

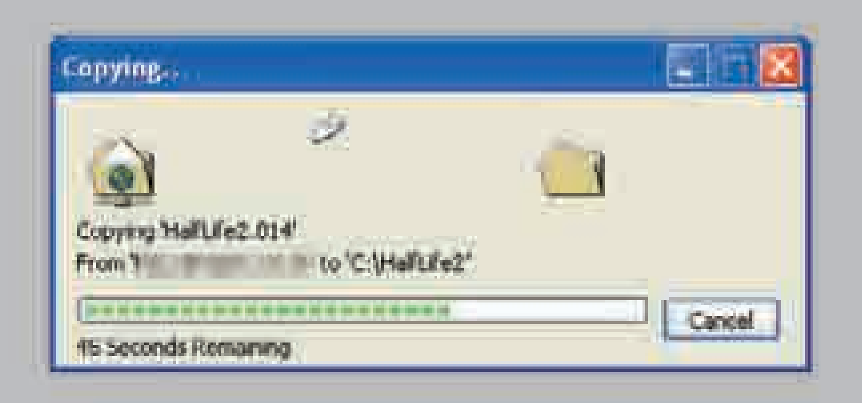
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FEATURE
MATURE GAMING
Why gaming really does have to grow up


eMag

Christmas is just around the corner, and as believers in all things multiformat we couldn't be happier. But if you were to ask us which format is likely to carry the strongest line-up this festive season, what do you think we'd say? The obvious PlayStation2? Or perhaps Xbox, with supporters rallying to its cause almost daily? Certainly, everyone has a favourite, but then if anyone actually stopped and thought about it for a second they might realise that the trusty old PC has snuck up out of nowhere and tapped them on the shoulder.

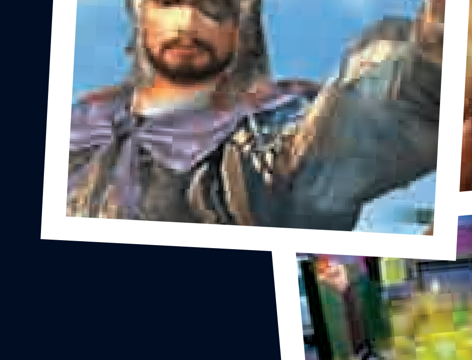
Looking at the games due out for late November alone it's hard to see a chink in the PC's armour. Decent FPS titles? Definitely, despite the absence of *Half-Life 2*. Online titles? Of course, this is the PC we're talking about. Even a slew of PS2 exclusives (in the form of *Prince Of Persia*, *Beyond Good & Evil* and the mighty *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*) make an appearance on the list. Strangely, it's only the PC that appears to have all the bases covered this Christmas, yet we doubt the industry will be singing its praises when spring arrives. The big question is: why not?

Simon Phillips, Group Editor






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Another year, another outing for Unreal. Will this instalment go one better than before?

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IT'S A NOT-SO-WONDERFUL LIFE

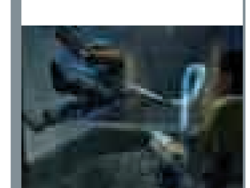
INDUSTRY UPROAR AS VALVE'S SHOOTER GETS HACKED

The much-anticipated first-person shooter *Half-Life 2* has fallen victim to hackers just days before its proposed release date. Source code for the high-profile game was stolen from Valve in an elaborate hacking scheme, and is sure to delay the game's release until 2004.

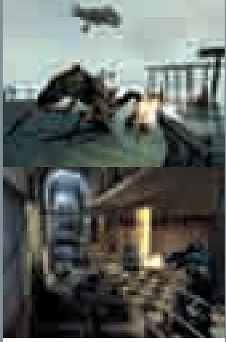
As a result of the intrusion, Valve had to disconnect many of its networked machines – a move that won't help the game's troubled production process. In a forum posting on www.halflife2.net, Valve MD Gabe Newell makes his desperation perfectly clear. Opening with the line 'Ever had one of those weeks?', Newell explains how the code was taken and encourages gamers to report any wrongdoing to helpvalve@valvesoftware.com.

But the firm is aware that illegal software spreads like wildfire on the internet, and attempting to shut down all providers is futile. With peer-to-peer applications bustling with would-be lawbreakers (a recent survey found that 29 per cent of internet users employ some kind of file-sharing software) Valve needs to concentrate on finishing the game and releasing it rather than trying to bring morality to the internet – surely this is the best way to kill interest in the leaked assets.

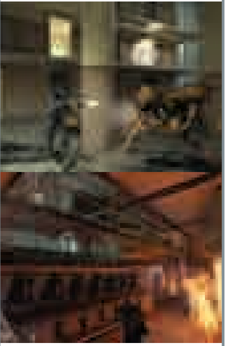
Many who have downloaded the code only did so to get a feel for the game and its much-touted physics engine, a trend that could be stopped with a more stable and, importantly, official trial version. Given the nature of the released code, we can't see sales being affected, but you can be sure many developers will now be upgrading their security.



Many gamers are curious about the physics engine.



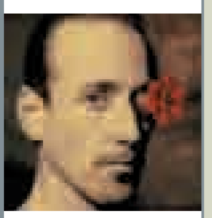
Could an official demo have prevented this theft?



Trying to track down the hackers could prove tricky.

THEFT FALLOUT

Now that the *Half-Life 2* code has been stolen, how will Valve and the industry react?

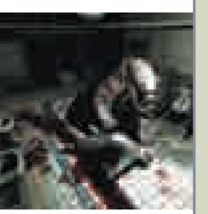


Valve is asking for gamers' help to find culprits.

VALVE

SURELY THE FIRM AT THE CENTRE OF THE COMMOTION HAS SOMETHING TO SAY?

If you search the internet for 'Half-Life 2 leak' we all but guarantee that one of the first links you click will have some kind of Gabe Newell quote on it – the Valve MD has been keen to enlist the gaming community in picking up the pieces and trying to make sure nothing like this can happen again. Clearly somewhat shaken by the lengths some people would go to in order to get their grubby mitts on *Half-Life 2*, Newell's involvement is impressive to say the least. Of course, conspiracy theories abound about Valve purposefully leaking barely playable code as some kind of crazy publicity stunt, but this strikes us as an exceptionally risky move and one we just can't see being a reality given the importance of the title. Still, in an industry where pigeons are spray-painted and games are blamed for serious crimes, maybe any publicity really is good publicity…



Other firms may now start to tighten web security.

THE INDUSTRY

ARE ALARM BELLS RINGING FOR OTHER DEVELOPERS AND PUBLISHERS?

Considering the severity of recent events and the possible consequences not just for Valve but the whole industry, we were fairly shocked at the number of firms who have refused to comment. Admittedly, it is common practice for companies to refuse to talk about the activities of others but we had hoped that the likes of Activision would be ready to let the world know how safe key titles such as *Doom III* will be. Still, this would probably only be seen as more of a challenge for the hackers – the harder their 'work' gets, the more determined they'll become. Elsewhere, smaller companies are clearly concerned – you'd imagine *Half-Life 2* to be a fairly safe and well-protected project, leaving less established developers understandably worried about these intrusions.



Steam controls the use of Valve's online properties.

LETTING OFF STEAM

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR VALVE'S INNOVATIVE ONLINE VENTURE?

Online file sharing – it may be the bane of many an honest developer or artist's life but it does show a great deal of activity within internet communities. Tapping this would make for a massive instant user base, something Valve is looking to buy into with Steam. Effectively a way of controlling distribution and online play of all its games, Steam has got off to a shaky start and the early version has many *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike* players up in arms. Described as "pointless", "annoying as hell" and "rushed out the door" by several users (views shared by much of the frustrated Steam community), the system is a great idea but is still plagued by teething troubles. Valve has also stated that *Half-Life 2* will be released on Steam before it becomes available in stores – a cheap way to rope in punters perhaps, but one that will no doubt be successful. If this leak has proved anything, it's that people want this game and they want it now.

Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



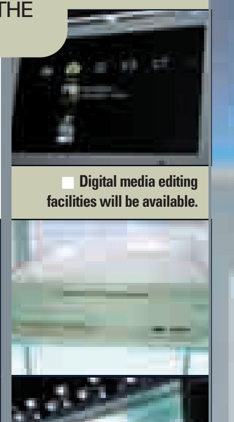
MYST-ERY GUEST
Ubisoft has announced the next two episodes in the *Myst* saga will feature songs by Peter Gabriel. The musician, whose Eighties hit *Sledgehammer* scooped the most music video awards ever, will provide a unique soundtrack to upcoming title *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst* – the latest game in a series that has shifted over 12 million units. "There are only a handful of artists whose work takes me to deeper places," said Rand Miller, CEO of *Myst* developer Cyan Worlds, "Peter Gabriel is one. His music is unique in its ability to paint a picture in my mind and give it life."



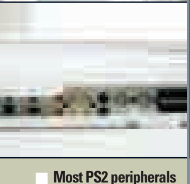


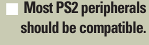
THE SONY PC
Thought the PlayStation2 was just a console? Think again. The European Court has officially recognised the machine as a computer. Sony filed the case demanding that the PS2 was entitled to the same exemption from EU customs duty enjoyed by PC manufacturers based on the machine's technical prowess. Although the duty-free allowance was already due to be extended to consoles next year, Sony may be able to claim back millions of Euros in tariffs imposed on previous PS2 shipments.



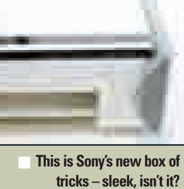


Digital media editing facilities will be available.

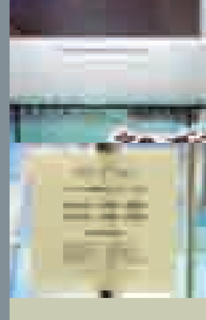




Most PS2 peripherals should be compatible.



This is Sony's new box of tricks – sleek, isn't it?



PS2 TO THE POWER OF X

SONY CONFIRMS ITS PLANS FOR PSX, AS WELL AS ADDING MORE NAILS TO THE PS3 COFFIN

Sony has finally confirmed the price of its PSX console/consumer entertainment system hybrid, along with a number of additional design specifications for the machine. The company has also revealed its plans to launch the machine in the West next year. Interestingly, not one, but two versions of the system are due to go on sale in Japan this Christmas, with the US and European launches next March.

Previously, it was thought that the hardware would include a 120GB hard drive, though we can now reveal that of the two variations available, the DESR-7000 model will come equipped with a massive 250GB hard drive, and the DESR-5000 with a healthy 160GB. Although there's still no price available for Europe, in Japan the systems will retail at ¥98,000 (£533), and ¥79,800 (£434) respectively. Expensive as they may seem, Sony is keen to point out that these machines aren't aimed at the average gamer. "PSX is being positioned as an aspirational, premium-priced product," says the firm's press release, hinting that this is probably the direction in which the company sees home entertainment moving in the future.

In fact, the ever-growing list of capabilities actually makes the PSX extremely good value for money, providing you need a single machine that does everything short of ironing your socks. As well as gaming and DVD functions, Sony has confirmed that the system will also be equipped with various digital media editing tools. Digital camera or video users, for example, will be able to upload high-resolution images and video footage, either via a USB cable or Sony memory stick.

Furthermore, a built-in ethernet port means the PSX can be linked to any compatible broadband network, allowing





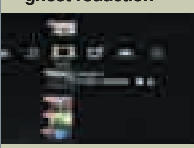
various downloads, such as MP3 music files. Sony points out that "since PSX is designed to run various features, users can upgrade or add new features later by accessing the net." We'd be interested to find out whether MP3s can be saved to a memory stick, then plugged into the PlayStation Portable, allowing players to listen to their own soundtracks while playing games.

It will also be possible to link the system to the net while simultaneously receiving and recording TV footage through the built-in analogue tuner (a digital variation is also expected as the product evolves). Up to 325 hours of footage can be saved on the DESR-7000 hard drive at any one time, and up to 204 hours with the DESR-5000. Of course, it's worth remembering that footage can easily be burned onto DVD, keeping the hard drive free of excess data. Unfortunately, the newer images of the hardware reveal that certain PS2 add-ons are unlikely to be compatible due to the design. With the memory card slots situated under a flap on the front of the machine, and the controller ports located around the back, PS2 multi-taps, for instance, won't fit as they plug into both sets of ports simultaneously.

Presumably, such issues have been deemed unimportant by Sony, which admits to using the hardware to get a greater number of DVD writers into homes – "Sony Marketing (Japan) aims to accelerate the expansion of the DVD recorder market by positioning PSX as the key to home entertainment and the core for digital electronics products throughout the living room," the company says. The again, we remember similarly bullish claims about the PlayStation2.

PSX FEATURES

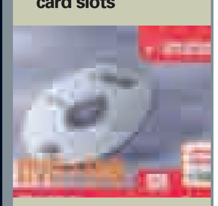
- High-capacity HDD+DVD (compatible with re-writable DVDs)
- PS2-based front-end operating system
- Compatible with future software upgrades
- High-speed dubbing from HDD to DVD (24-speed max)
- Various recording/ playback features (users can watch and record footage from/to the hard drive at the same time)
- Analogue terrestrial TV tuner with ghost reduction



- Progressive-scan DVD video output
- Digital photo and video editing



- Memory stick slot
- USB port
- PS2 & PSone software compatibility
- Two PS2 control pad ports
- Two PS2 memory card slots





NOT ANOTHER...

NEXT-GEN STORY

WE TAKE A FURTHER LOOK AT THE TOPICS THAT WON'T GO AWAY

It's getting to that time again when PCs are starting to out-class consoles, and all the technology-minded developers out there are looking to the next generation for the additional power they crave. And although there's still nothing set in stone regarding final specifications for the next batch of consoles, new snippets of information have emerged, along with all the usual rumours.

Most interesting is the news that Sony will begin manufacturing its much-talked-about Cell chip during the final quarter of 2005, with the launch of the PS3 now slated for 2006. However, industry reports hint that such a thing is widely ambitious, and that 2007 is a far more realistic date for work on the chip to begin. Of course, this leaves Microsoft and Nintendo in a difficult position. If Sony does somehow manage to pull it off, Xbox 2 and the successor to GameCube will surely have to feature similar technology in order to compete. Sony will apparently be releasing some sort of PS3-related news at E3 next May, presumably in the form of provisional specifications and graphics demos.

In related news, the word on the street is that Microsoft may be working with IBM to develop the CPU for its next system. If this is to be believed, the new console will be using almost identical core technology to the next Nintendo machine, what with ATI already known to be providing graphics chips for both companies. It's quite possible that Microsoft may already be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of Nintendo's systems through feedback from developers who have worked on both machines. Clearly, with GameCube still breaking even at just £79.99, the chipset is far more cost-effective than its rivals. More news on this as it breaks.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



FINAL FANTASY VII RETURNS

Before you get too excited, we must warn you that Square Enix's follow-up to *Final Fantasy VII* will not be a game, but a movie. *Final Fantasy V II: Advent Children*, set two years after the events of the game, will make its debut on DVD rather than get a cinematic release. Some gamers see the release of the movie as a way of simply reviving interest in the original game before a sequel is launched. Little is known about the plot yet, but the characters seem to have switched their anime-styled roots for a more traditional look.

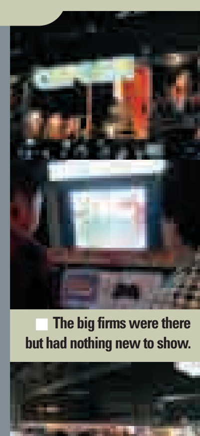




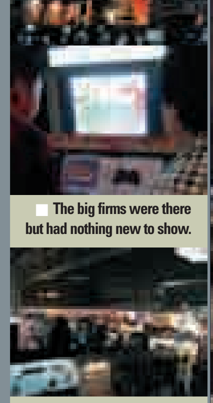
MICROSOFT'S NEW MOVE

Yoshihiro Maruyama has become the latest manager of Microsoft's Xbox division in Japan. Maruyama-san formerly worked at Squaresoft and has been given the arduous task of turning around the Xbox and its Live service. Maruyama-san's track record is impressive (he's one of the key figures in raising Squaresoft's profile in the West) and we're sure Microsoft is hoping that he hasn't lost his golden touch. It's well known that Microsoft has been after Square Enix for some time, so who better to restart talks with the company than its COO?





The big firms were there but had nothing new to show.



BEST IN SHOW

The games that kept us playing well after our bedtimes

ROCKMAN X: COMMAND MISSION
A Mega Man-based RPG with shades of *Super Mario RPG* gameplay. One to look for when it hits PS2 and GameCube over here in 2004.

KUNOICHI
SEGA's quasi-sequel to *Shinobi* on the PS2 handles much better with its new female ninja at the helm. Clumsily renamed *Nightshade* for the Western release.

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE ANNIVERSARY EDITION
A remix (rather than a remake) that has every *SFII* fan sweating buckets. Hopefully, we can expect a lot more games like this in the very near future.

YOUNG GATT
A surprisingly enjoyable RPG being developed for Xbox and PC. Sadly, it looks like it'll only see the light of day in Japan and surrounding countries.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
Still very enjoyable – if not for the game and free T-shirt, then for the Yakuza-style Japanese girls that came and entertained us while we played it.



PREMIER JAPANESE EVENT FAILS TO DELIVER ANY REAL SURPRISES

TOKYO NO-SHOW

Maybe it was a sign of the games industry's future, or perhaps just an attempt to fall in line with every other disappointing gaming event this year, but the recent Tokyo Game Show proved to be anything but the glorious display of videogames that the visiting masses hoped it would be. True, there were several titles that managed to please the fans but there was also very little in the way of exciting announcements – only someone who'd been living under a boulder would have been surprised by most of the news. Yet despite the lacklustre content, the event, held once again at the Makuhari Messe Convention Center in Tokyo's Chiba district, attracted many more visitors than last year's show – over 30,000 people attended on the initial Business Day (an increase of 10,000 on the previous year) while some 150,000 gamers visited the show across all three days.

Naturally, some of the strongest offerings came from the places you'd most expect. Capcom had a particularly packed stand with more than 12 titles on show – even though some, like *Crimson Tears* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, were only in video form. Playable pods featuring titles such as *Hyper Street Fighter II*, *Gotcha Force*, *Resident Evil: Outbreak* and *Onimusha: Blade Warriors* (whose multiplayer fighting action now appears to be more like *Power Stone* than ever, thanks to a combination of simple controls and outlandish weapons) were also available. However, it was the publisher's *GTA3* stand – featuring private gameplay booths and Yakuza ladies – that probably got the most attention.

SEGA was another company with plenty to show, thanks in part to its revitalised Ages range, with remakes of classic titles such as *Afterburner* and *Golden Axe* pulling in the crowds. Its new take on the *Shinobi* series, *Kunoichi*, also proved popular, with developer Overworks demonstrating a new-found appreciation of the genre after the criticism of the original PS2 effort. Despite not being as ground-breaking as perhaps it should be in a market that still remains untapped, Microsoft also had a reasonably solid showing that



belied the console's lack of popularity in Japan. Games such as *Steel Battalion: Line Of Contact* appealed to the nation's mecha fanatics, while *Halo 2* (in video form only – the same one that aired at X03) showed what was on the horizon for Xbox owners, but again, this was old news.

And this was perhaps the problem with this year's Tokyo Game Show – the biggest surprises didn't have so much to do with what was on display, but rather what wasn't. For instance, despite high expectations, Square Enix disappointed everyone by failing to display anything even remotely exciting. The appearance of its upcoming *Dragon Quest Slime* for the GBA (complete with requisite cuddly *Slime* toys) failed to mask a distinct lack of more desired titles, such as *Dragon Quest VIII*. Even worse, though, was the decision to hold back the unveiling of *Final Fantasy XII*, which is now due to be shown at a special event on 19 November – a strange choice, considering that it could have easily been the star of the Tokyo show.

Either way, a lack of truly ground-breaking titles (or at least, ones that we hadn't already seen at other shows) was the one thing that TGS 2003 was missing, making it a somewhat disappointing affair. Where once the TGS used to be the launching pad for new titles, this year ended up being a mere follow-up to E3. We can only hope that this doesn't happen every year.

gamesTM THE TOP FIVE

ARCADE GAMES WE WISH CAME HOME



No.5 DERBY OWNERS CLUB

We always did want our own pony



No.4 CRISIS ZONE

Less thinking, more shooting – great



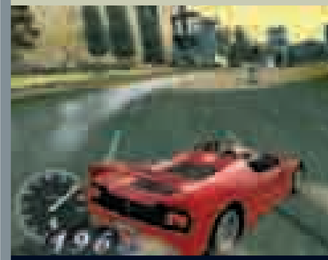
No.3 WILD RIDERS

Short, but full of frantic biking fun



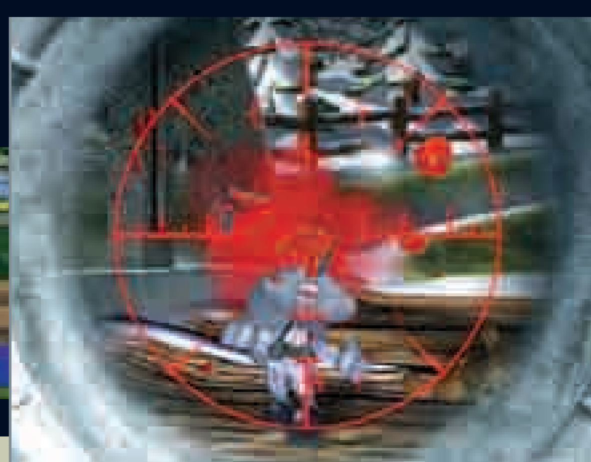
No.2 STAR WARS TRILOGY

Atmospheric Force action at its best



No.1 OUT RUN 2

If this doesn't happen, we'll cry…



A RIGHT RARE RUCKUS

MICROSOFT-OWNED FIRM SHAKEN MORE THAN A MARTINI

With the dust from September's disappointing X03 event now settled, the lack of anything even remotely resembling a decent announcement – like last year's acquisition of developer Rare – still has us smarting. Thankfully, with new information concerning cancellations, reshuffles and departures within Twycross-based Rare quietly emerging from a number of sources, it looks like we won't have to wait too long before something interesting slips through the wall of silence.

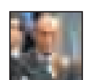
First comes the suggestion of the cancellation of games that, while not officially announced, have been bubbling away for some time – namely Rare's very hush-hush MMORPG (supposedly codenamed *Quest*) and *Sabreman Stampede*, formerly *Donkey Kong Racing*. Although the disappearance of *Quest* isn't something that will upset too many gamers, *Sabreman Stampede* always looked rather promising and its possible canning may dishearten some people, particularly as the departure of the game's lead designer goes some way to confirming its demise.

But it's not all bad news. Anyone disappointed with how *Conker: Live And Uncut* looked at E3 should rest assured that changes are apparently in the pipeline. With a re-formed team now working on the game and Chris Seavor (project leader on the original N64 game) back at the helm, we can only hope that things will improve. Best of all, we might not have to wait long to find out – it would appear that Microsoft's International Games Festival is due to return in February next year, allowing Rare to show off its wares to full effect.



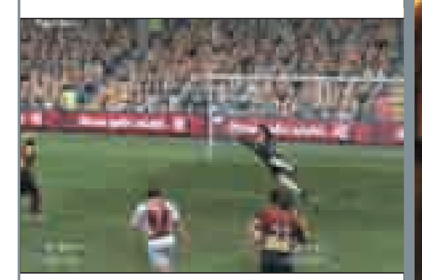


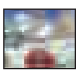
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



TITLE ASPIRATIONS

The finest football game ever created looks to make a strong start to its title campaign this year, following Konami's announcement that UK pre-orders for *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* topped the one million mark prior to its October release. A playable single-half demo was offered as an incentive for fans to get their money down early. The news coincides with Konami's decision to discontinue its *Winning Eleven* version of the franchise on the GameCube, fuelling rumours of an Xbox debut as part of the game's online evolution.





COIN-OP ONLY?

Assumptions that Microsoft would automatically secure console ports of the major arcade titles being developed on its Chihiro hardware have been placed in doubt by SEGA's hesitancy over releasing the likes of *Out Run 2* and *Virtua Cop 3* on the Xbox. Despite both games using the Xbox-based arcade hardware that would virtually eliminate any technical problems during the crossover to home machines, SEGA has questioned demand for console versions, citing *Virtua Cop 3*'s lightgun requirement and the trend for renting rather than buying racing games as potential stumbling blocks.



TO BE ANY GOOD TAKES AGES

A NEW, MORE FOCUSED SEGA TO TAKE INDUSTRY BY STORM (APPARENTLY)

Multiplayer *Shenmue*? Interesting idea…

SEGA has unveiled the new names of its seven development studios following the recent restructuring of the company. Joining SEGA AM2, Hitmaker Ltd, Amusement Vision, Sonic Team Ltd and Smilebit Corporation come SEGA Wow (formerly Wow Entertainment and Overworks) and DigitalRex.

Initially dubbed 'Cinematic Online Games', Yu Suzuki's DigitalRex is a group of 27 employees that will focus mostly on massively multiplayer network games, both for PC and console formats. Specific projects have yet to be announced, though the studio's new website includes a link to Shenmue.com, hinting that an online version of Suzuki-san's ambitious adventure game may be more than just a rumour.

Unfortunately the restructure didn't bring good news for all SEGA's employees. Although it had already been revealed that United Game Artists (the team responsible for *Rez* and *Space Channel 5*) was being disbanded, it was unclear what would happen to the team leader, Tetsuya Mizuguchi. Responsible for memorable titles such as *SEGA Rally 2* and *Manx TT Superbike*, everyone assumed that Mizuguchi-san would be repositioned within one of the other SEGA teams, though the company has since announced his departure. Word has it he intends to set up his own development house, though details have yet to be confirmed.

Despite its new confidence and desire to be financially successful, we have to ask whether this latest restructure will be enough to get SEGA back on track. Similarly brave moves over the last few years have proved unsuccessful, and there still seem to be an awful lot of bad decisions being made. Talk of *Out Run 2* not getting a console release seems a sure-fire way of losing fans, while working exclusively on Nintendo projects, such as *F-Zero* and *Billy Hatcher*, immediately restricts the possible user base. The next year should certainly be interesting…

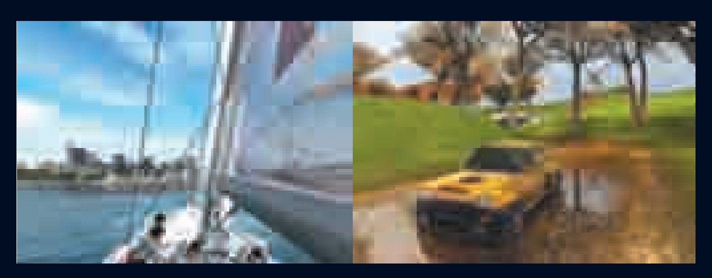
SINK OR SWIM?

ANOTHER UK START-UP ENTERS THE INDUSTRY'S CHOPPY WATERS

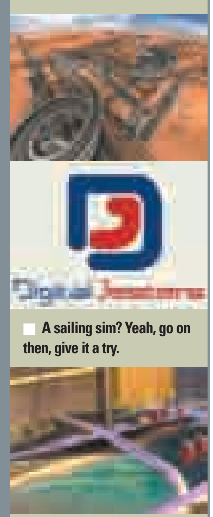
Terry Malham and Leo Zullo – the duo behind CDV's successful UK division – have turned their backs on the company to concentrate on building their own publishing label, Digital Jesters. Working with French developer Nadeo, the new outfit is set to serve up its first titles at the end of November in the shape of lukewarm PC games *Virtua Skipper 3* and *TrackMania*.

Despite their proven track record at CDV, it's a brave move for the founders to go it alone in such an uncertain climate, although inspiration must surely come from fellow UK publisher Empire Interactive's announcement of record revenues for the first half of 2003. Owing much to the performance of major titles *Starsky & Hutch* and *Big Mutha Truckers* in turning around the heavy losses it reported in 2002, Empire is looking forward to further success over the next year having secured licences for *Bad Boys II*, *Starship Troopers* and *Ford Racing*.

The company's success is a rare case, however, as the scene looks increasingly bleak for UK developers. *Battle Engine Aquila* publisher Lost Toys has become the latest addition to the frighteningly long list of casualties.







A sailing sim? Yeah, go on then, give it a try.

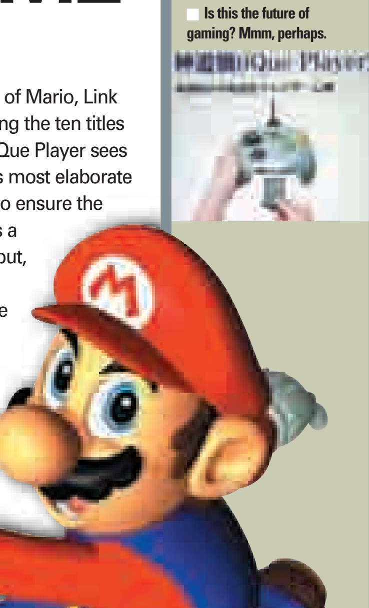
NINTENDO TAKES ITS BATTLE AGAINST PIRACY RIGHT INTO THE LION'S DEN

THE VIDEOGAME TAKEAWAY

The staggering rate of videogame piracy in China has long kept console developers from releasing and supporting their hardware in the world's most populous country. But now Nintendo has finally lifted its boycott in a bold move to establish a market for Chinese gaming that will purportedly remain safe from the pirates' clutches.

Retailing at 498 Yuan (about £37), the iQue Player comes equipped with a special memory card. For a measly 48 Yuan (about £3.50), the owner can take the card into any shop fitted with an official Nintendo terminal and furnish themselves with a game uniquely encrypted to run on their home machine. The console is based on relatively primitive N64 technology, and Chinese gamers can expect to find the familiar adventures of Mario, Link and Fox McCloud among the ten titles initially available. The iQue Player sees Nintendo employing its most elaborate anti-piracy system yet to ensure the Chinese public receives a legitimate fix of Mario but, with the immensely lucrative potential of the Chinese market as yet untapped by its competitors, such extreme measures could well pay off for the Japanese giant.

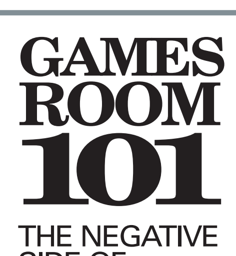




Is this the future of gaming? Mmm, perhaps.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO.11: SO MANY GAMES, SUCH LITTLE TIME

Call us cynical, but what happened to the days of being able to easily pigeonhole games into different genres? Back when we were young, you knew exactly what you were getting when you bought a game – even if you only took a cursory glance at the screenshots on the back of the box, you could make a fairly safe assumption. Now, though, we're entering the age of the multi-genre game. It's one of those trends that just keeps getting more prolific, much like the overused cel-shading or ragdoll physics. A game can't just be a single idea today, you see; it has to have several different elements, all combined to create a single entity and then marketed as a revolution in gaming.

Not that this is a bad thing, of course. Being the forward-thinking types that we are, we're all for an evolution in gaming as long as it benefits us as gamers. Sadly, that's not always the case. When a decent concept swiftly deteriorates into a number of sub-standard mini-game sections that feel sloppily cobbled together, that's where the problems start. And with more companies trying it, there are going to be those that fail… and we'll be only too happy to point them out.



Ubisoft's *BG&E* manages to blend several styles together successfully, without ever feeling disjointed.



By trying to mix genres, LucasArts has messed up what could have been a great game.

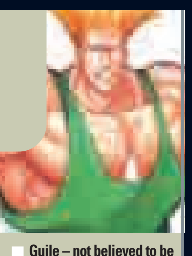
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

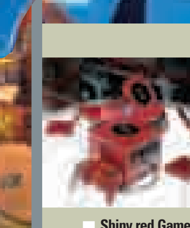


PAY NOW, PLAY LATER

Following the popularity of incentives to drum up pre-orders for *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* and *Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike*, US Cube owners are again being tempted to part with their readies early by being offered a tasty bundle of playable demos in a *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* deal. Although there was no confirmation of a similar deal for UK gamers at the time of going to press, rumours of a *Legend Of Zelda: Collector's Edition* disc being produced had prompted much speculation about future bonus bundles involving this intriguing compilation of classic *Zelda* titles.



Guile – not believed to be singing on new soundtrack.



Shiny red GameCubes won't be on sale in the UK.



SOUNDS OF THE STREET

CAPCOM'S BRAWLER TO GET ANNIVERSARY SOUNDTRACK

Capcom has become the latest publisher to jump on the game soundtrack bandwagon after announcing that the music from the Street Fighter II series will receive an orchestral re-working.

While CD soundtracks are not uncommon in Japan though (particularly for bigger titles and ones that already have orchestral scores), they're usually not on the scale of Capcom's planned release – one that fits in perfectly with the company's efforts to celebrate 15 years of the popular beat-'em-up franchise. The compilation CD – imaginatively entitled *Street Fighter Tribute Album* – is being worked on by some of the most experienced game-music composers in the business, although it's unlikely you'll have heard of many of them.

Twelve composers – including Ayako Sasou (*Ridge Racer*), Manami Matsumae (*Mega Man*), Takenobu Mitsuyoshi (*Daytona USA*) and Yuzou Koshiro (*Sonic The Hedgehog*) – are due to take charge of creating orchestral versions of various *Street Fighter II* stage themes. The album is due to be released in Japan on 17 December to coincide with the release of *Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition*, a conglomeration of 15 years' of *SFII* action. Expect the CD to appear here sometime early next year.

NINTENDO CONTINUES TO ROLL OUT MORE COLOURFUL CONSOLES

COLOURS MAY VARY

In a questionable attempt to give itself a more sophisticated image, Nintendo is making its GameCube and Game Boy Advance consoles available in an increasing number of colours. The latest in its line of colourful machines is the Starlight Gold SP, bringing the total number of finishes available in the East well into double figures.

Although many colours have yet to grace our shores, Nintendo is slowly beginning to add to the choice it gives PAL gamers with the likes of the Flame Red SP, though it's unlikely that the matching GameCube will make it over here too. So as the Game Boy Advance continues to sell like the hottest of cakes (despite being £10 more expensive than the Cube), is this strategy really working?

There must be something to it – limited edition console bundles seem to do the business (*Boktai*, *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* and *Sword Of Mana* have all had their own consoles) and if they weren't adding to Nintendo's coffers, we very much doubt Nintendo would continue to makeover the wonder handheld. Indeed, we can think of several people who have bought several GBAs purely on cosmetic grounds, and as long as we're suckered in by this (admittedly original) ruse the Game Boy will continue to dominate well into next year. But hey, we're happy suckers, right?



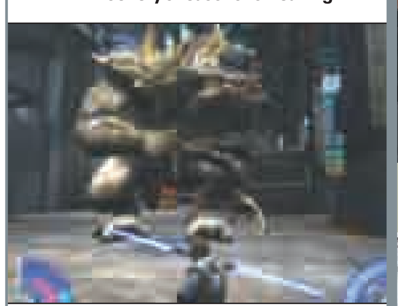


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ROOM AT THE TOP

LucasArts' vice president of finance and administration, Mike Nelson, has temporarily taken over general manager duties at the firm following the shock departure of president Simon Jeffery. After three successful years in the role, Jeffery unexpectedly revealed plans to return to Britain with his family. Although his resignation follows a lucrative year that saw the release of a host of impressive *Star Wars* titles, the less convincing activities of LucasArts' in-house development team have sparked speculation about Jeffery's reasons for leaving.





Dragon Quest may appear on mobile phones soon.

MOBILE FANTASY?

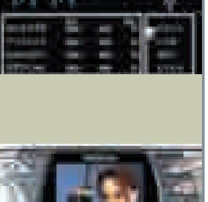
SQUARE ENIX AND EA PLEDGE THEIR SUPPORT FOR POCKET GAMING

Japanese giant Square Enix has announced its plans to begin developing games for mobile phones, although it hasn't confirmed any European releases. Initially working in partnership with telecommunications specialists NTT DoCoMo the company will be porting a number of its biggest franchises to the i-Mode, Japan's most popular mobile phone.

Like Nokia's N-Gage, the i-Mode can produce moderately impressive 3D visuals, though the first batch of titles developed by SE will be traditional 2D affairs – we can expect visuals on a par with those seen on the SNES. Specifics have yet to be confirmed, though translations of NES classics such as *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* are amongst the first games expected to launch.

Presumably, much of the work involved will be handled by the teams previously responsible for the company's WonderSwan handheld conversions.

Another major developer/publisher to announce mobile support is Electronic Arts, which has confirmed a version of *FIFA 2004* for the N-Gage. Impressively, the game will feature 300 teams and 6,000 real players, though quite how the visuals will be displayed on the vertical screen is a mystery. Of course, the fact that EA is supporting the format at all suggests that Nokia is doing something right.



Lara looks fine but the N-Gage is getting a facelift.



BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

NOKIA'S N-GAGE SET FOR A COMPLETE REDESIGN?

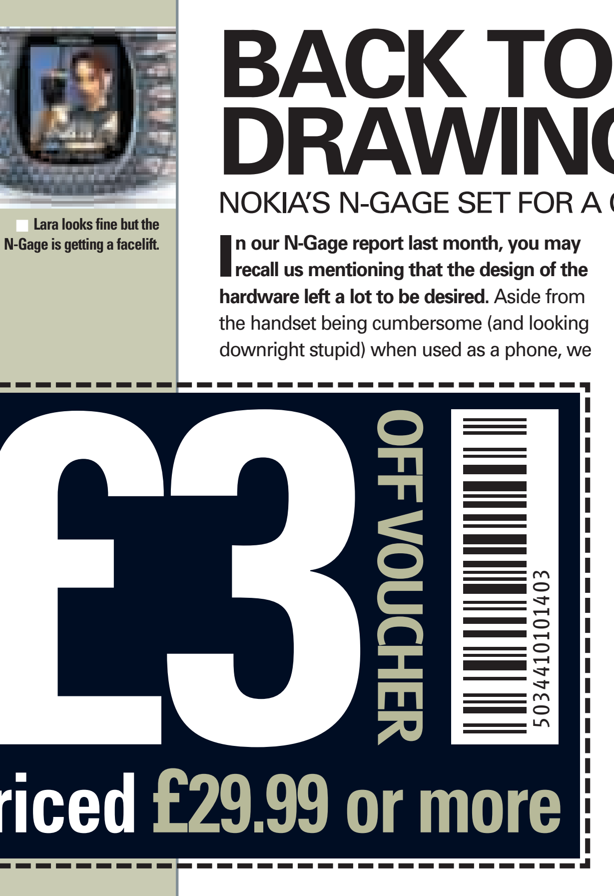
In our N-Gage report last month, you may recall us mentioning that the design of the hardware left a lot to be desired. Aside from the handset being cumbersome (and looking downright stupid) when used as a phone, we were shocked at just how tricky and time-consuming it was to install the games. Surely anyone wishing to buy a device that plays games and music, as well as doubling as a phone, would want something as user-friendly as possible, not to mention pleasing to the eye.

Now, word has it that the company has taken our (and other gamers') criticisms into account and is currently adjusting the design of the hardware for re-release next summer. Nothing has been formally announced so far – with thousands of standard hardware units still sitting in shops across the country, Nokia really needs to sell some of its current stock before issuing any hardware updates.

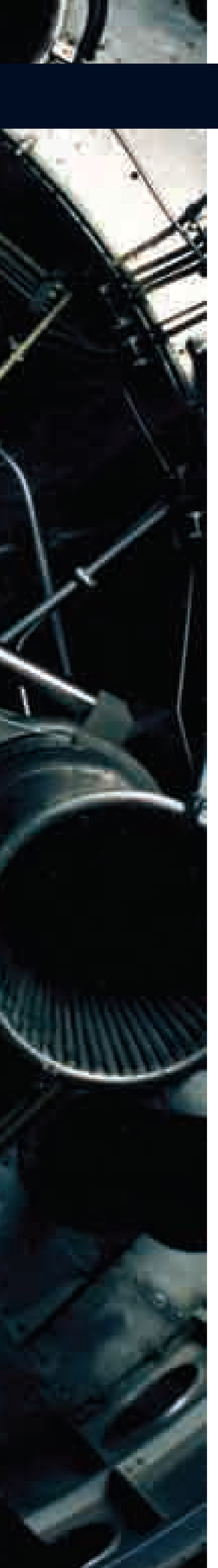
If the redesign rumours are to be believed, though, the N-Gage could potentially become a major contender in the handheld market – it certainly has the power, the support and the games, after all. And with disappointing sales figures so far, Nokia doesn't have anything to lose by making its 'revolutionary' machine easier to use.

We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £3 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. And with Christmas on the way, what better time to start saving a bit of cash here and there?





BETWEEN CODING THE WORLD'S FASTEST ASSEMBLER AND RECEIVING PRICELESS GIFTS FROM MIYAMOTO-SAN, JEZ SAN'S TWO-DECADE CAREER AT ARGONAUT HAS BEEN NOTHING IF NOT EVENTFUL. BUT WHAT LIES IN STORE FOR THE LONDON-BASED DEVELOPER?





"NINTENDO SEEMS TO THINK IT'S A TOY COMPANY WHILE SONY THINKS IT'S A MEDIA COMPANY. I KNOW WHICH I'D RATHER BE IN THE NEXT DECADE"

JEZ SAN, ARGONAUT

JEZ SAN

ARGONAUT

Although Argonaut may not be a name familiar to many, the established firm is responsible for a lot more than it's given credit for. With an impressive catalogue of software (from excellent PSone shooter *Alien Resurrection* to the forthcoming *Powerdrome* update) and hardware (the company famously developed the SNES SuperFX chip for Nintendo), it's amazing to think that all this came from the vision and drive of one man.

Born a stone's throw away from Argonaut's current base in North London, Jez San's story is one of commitment. Having started down the gaming path at the age of 12 with an imported Tandy TRS-80, it wasn't long before the technically minded youngster began programming his own software on the BBC. The coding snowballed from there as a young San continued to educate himself in the ways of every programming language he could find. "I had no formal training," he admits. "I was self-taught at 13 years old to program BASIC and around a year later I learned assembler – first Z80, then 6502, then 68000, transputer, 8086…"

Incredibly, just a year later San founded Argonaut. Having put in some time at SilverSoft the previous summer, and with his programming and technical wizardry, starting a company was the next logical step for the ambitious teenager, who formed Argonaut as a software consultancy. The company's first title was a Commodore 64 game called *Skyline Attack* and while this failed to make a name for the fledgling firm, the next project did rather better. In *StarGlider*, considered by many to be the first ever 3D game, Argonaut had a product that would catapult it into the spotlight and turn Jez's dream into a success. "Naturally *StarGlider* was the seminal moment for me, establishing me in the industry," says San. "The royalties from its success are what helped grow the company from a kid in his bedroom to the 270 people we are today."

Which brings us to the present day, with Argonaut working closely with industry bigwigs such as Namco, even if the results aren't always what you might call perfect. Case in point: *Malice*. Originally lined up for the Xbox launch, the title has been through hell, much to the despair of the developers. "I feel it was a shame *Malice* was pulled about in different directions by several companies who we got involved with," recounts San before giving new hope to those that thought the adventure (which recruits No Doubt for voiceover and music duty) was gone for good. "It's found a good home and will hopefully come out this Christmas."

But this isn't just a man who makes games – this is a man who loves games. This is a man who forced his school into teaching computer lessons only to loaf around in them and still pass with flying colours. A man part-responsible for the birth of three-dimensional gaming. A man who claims to have been the first in the world to have finished *Super Mario World*. How? "Miyamoto-san gave me a copy himself, months before it came out," he boasts. "I played that game solidly on a pre-release SNES for a month." Strange then that the first person to put the ultimate platformer through its paces should speak out about its creators so freely. "Once upon a time they had a 95 per cent market share but they got arrogant, complacent, political and played safe. Nintendo seems to think it's a toy company while Sony thinks it's a media company," Jez observes, adding: "I know which I'd rather be in the next decade."

With some prestigious achievements behind it, Jez's firm is already planning a long way ahead. "Games are becoming much more expensive to develop – PlayStation 3 and Xbox 2 will require even more people working to create titles that fulfil consumer expectations," says a clearly troubled San, but his company isn't alone in this anxiety. "I know of plenty of rich companies who are a lot poorer this year – I don't know of many developers doing exceedingly well right now." He's got a point – only a few firms seem to be enjoying commercial success, and after *Harry Potter* and *Lord Of The Rings* steal Christmas… "I don't think you can generalise that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer," quips San, "EA gets rich and everyone else gets poorer."

To close, the Argonaut CEO hints that he may have a few tidbits on the next generation of hardware. "I'm salivating already – it's an exciting time," he tells us, and when the man who cleared 96 goals before you even knew that *Super Mario World* existed gets excited, there has to be something in it…



That time of year is upon us once more. A time when friends and family alike arrive in droves looking to be entertained. A time when multiplayer and gimmicky games really come into their own. The only time when you may not be ridiculed by your peers for splashing out over a hundred notes on a cheap set of red maracas and a dancing monkey. We speak, of course, of the festive period when all those one-off peripheral-based games that sit gathering dust for 11 months see the action they deserve, often from players who know very little about gaming culture. To them, it doesn't matter how long the long-term appeal of the EyeToy is, or what your high score is on *Paranoia* – they just want a drop of the sauce and a good time. The former can be found lining the shelves of your local off-licence but what of the latter? **games™** checks out the ultimate party games…

FRIENDS, FAMILY AND PETS BEWARE – IS NOBODY SAFE FROM THE SEA OF GIMMICK GAMES AND MULTI-MAN MADNESS?

PARTY **HARD**

TRIED AND TESTED

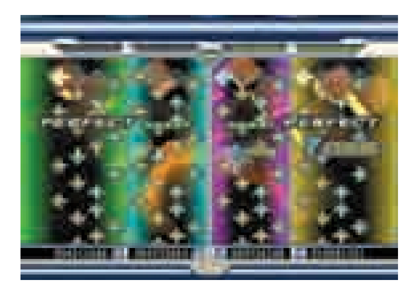
LET'S DANCE

THE QUICK-STEPPING CRAZE CONTINUES TO BUILD PACE

From starry-eyed pre-teens stepping along with Kylie to twenty-something should-know-betters playing *DDR* imports religiously, the *Dancing Stage* phenomenon never fails to impress with its broad appeal. Sadly, unless you've got like-minded (or open-minded) friends, this is no party catalyst – expect the same few people to work up a sweat while everyone else gets bored. Still, for those who do get a kick out of what Konami maintains is 'dancing', this is looking like being the best Christmas yet.

Dancing Stage Fever should soon be lighting up the PlayStation2, with *Unleashed* launching on the Xbox (a first for the series). It doesn't stop there either, with imports (*DDRMAX2* in the US and *Extreme* coming from Japan) and alternatives (*Dance:UK* and *Pop Idol* among others) making sure your dance mats see plenty of trampling.

Hard-core dancers might want to invest in a metal mat for long-term use.

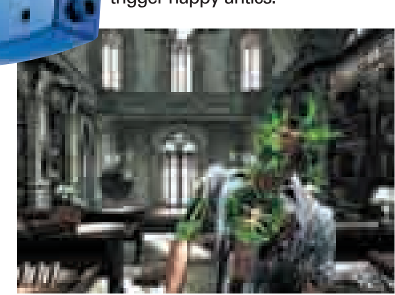


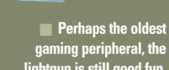
PACKING HEAT

THERE'S A SENSE OF POWER IN WIELDING A PLASTIC PIECE…

One of the longest-running console peripherals, the lightgun may have enjoyed its heyday but that hasn't stopped a number of compatible games falling onto shelves in recent years. The main fault with the genre is originality – there's only so much that can be done within the constraints of shooting at a screen. Still, as far as multiplayer fun is concerned, the genre covers most bases. The *Time Crisis* and *The House Of The Dead* series offer fine co-operative play, but for the full party experience you'll want the PSone classic *Point Blank* (or either of its sequels).

Designed with large-scale multiplayer in mind, the quick and simple blasting through many party play modes is yet to be surpassed. Of course, it does limit you to two players at once, but if your mates are happy to take turns the action doesn't get much more adrenaline-pumping than these trigger-happy antics.





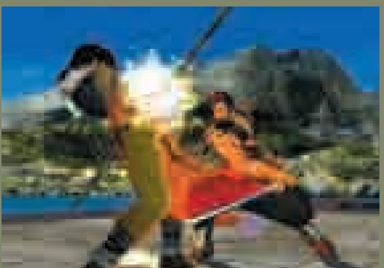
Perhaps the oldest gaming peripheral, the lightgun is still good fun.

IMPROPER GAMEPLAY USING THOSE PERIPHERALS IN WAYS YOU HADN'T THOUGHT OF



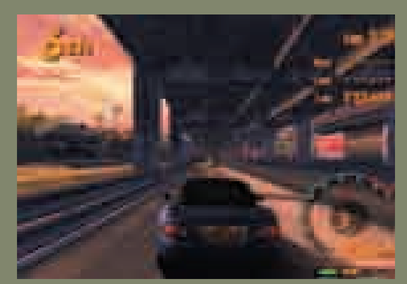
International Track And Field + Dance Mat (PSone/PS2)

How better to capture the spirit of athletics than to actually put your back into it? Forcing you to physically run on the spot in order to earn victory, this is hands down one of the best alternative uses for a dance mat and guaranteed to provide a few laughs.



Soul Calibur + Fishing Rod (Dreamcast)

One of the more widely known cases of improvement via improper gameplay, the ability to play the game using the fishing rod peripheral is a strange yet enjoyable one. Okay, it doesn't work particularly well but experiences such as this are rare, particularly the twin rod face-off. Fearsome.



Gran Turismo 3 + Dance Mat (PlayStation2)

Another dance mat misuse, yes, but nothing like the household Olympics. After tinkering with the controls, the driver sits on the middle of the mat with their feet on the X and O buttons (to accelerate and brake) and leans to steer. Dubbed 'Groin Turismo' for reasons that will become clear after 15 minutes or so…



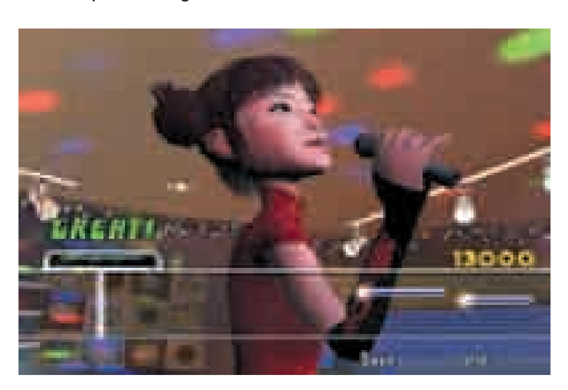
SING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

AT LEAST A CONSOLE WON'T GO ON ABOUT 'STAR QUALITY'

The newest addition to the console 'gimmick' game line-up, karaoke titles have long been a possibility but it's only recently that the technology has been put to use. It looks as though *Karaoke Stage* from the dream pairing of Konami and Harmonix will be the first out over here. Offering up to eight players the chance to be graded by the PlayStation2 (a task it does remarkably well) or by fellow players, it's clear these two firms know a fair bit about music games and party play.

Karaoke games occupy a space somewhere between the EyeToy and dancing games – incredibly simple to pick up, it just takes one punter to start the ball rolling and an entire crowd can be hooked. Unfortunately, not everyone can play these titles – spare a thought for those not blessed with the voice of an angel and those without the confidence to belt out *Broken Wings* regardless. While it's still early days for this new genre, several firms have already announced interest or activity in the field. Sony will bring us *Sing* early next year while the Xbox Music Mixer will also offer karaoke potential, if perhaps not in the same impressive digital manner as the Konami/Harmonix title.

Now you can 'be' any one of a number of chirpy popstrels with the new range of karaoke titles.



EYE FOR AN EYE

SONY'S HUGELY SUCCESSFUL PERIPHERAL HAS PLENTY IN STORE FOR US YET

In terms of mass appeal, the ultimate game would be something anyone can play, something that requires no reading, learning or practice, something simple yet enjoyable. And they haven't come much closer than this. Despite having the lifespan of a bacon sandwich, the EyeToy is the ultimate party gadget. There's something about the combination of staring at yourself on TV and performing no-brainer tasks that means anyone can jump straight in and play, and even those who abstain early on are often ensnared once the action kicks off.

Currently, only the bundled game package *EyeToy: Play* is available, but with two more sets planned for the coming months (namely *EyeToy: Groove*, a rhythm action paradise, and the self-explanatory *EyeToy: Sports*), we've far from seen the last of the curious device. Perhaps most impressive is the price – by keeping this on a par with the rest of the charts, the added cost that stops many a peripheral-based experience enjoying mass success is eliminated, and even though the hardware is far from high-end it more than serves its purpose.

Yes, you'll look a bit gimpy, but we're afraid the festive season positively demands it…



GOING BACK IN TIME WHY LIMIT YOURSELF TO THE LATEST BATCH OF DIGITISED EMBARRASSMENT?



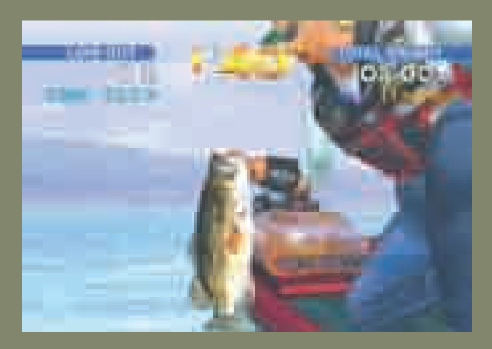
SAMBA DE AMIGO

Quite possibly the ultimate party game, *Samba De Amigo* may be worth a bob or two now but if you're among the lucky few who own a set of maracas (or even, dare we say, two sets), this is always the best time of year to dust them off and get funky.



BEATMANIA

Fancy yourself as something of a DJ, do you? Konami's *BeatMania* games give you a mini-keyboard and a deck (of sorts) and drop you in at the deep end with some funky tunes. Great fun but the series has a reputation for being a little on the tricky side…



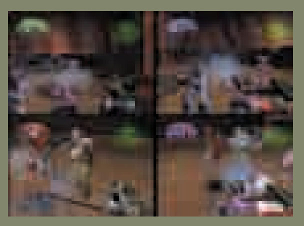
SEGA BASS FISHING TOUR

Worst idea for a game ever? You'd think so, and even on paper, *SEGA Bass Fishing* is a horrible concept. But once you get that plastic rod in your hands the will to hook a whopper is overwhelming. Good clean fun for all the family

FIVE FOR FOUR

5 TIME SPLITTERS 2

■ Fast-paced frantic fun, few shooters can hold a torch to Free Radical's multiplayer gem.



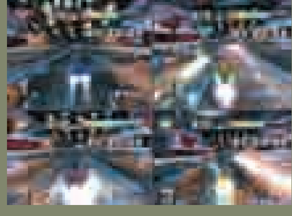
4 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

■ Why stop at four when up to eight people can join in the finest footie re-creation to date?



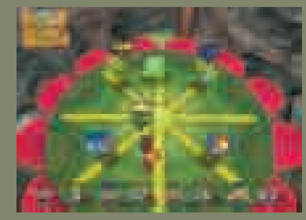
3 F-ZERO X

■ If you've got a strong stomach the breakneck pace of *GX* creates some competitive gaming sessions.



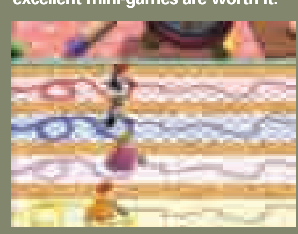
2 SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

■ With so much variety, you can't fault SEGA's simians. One of the greatest party games around.



1 MARIO PARTY 4

■ Nintendo's digital board game can be a little slow-paced but the excellent mini-games are worth it.



...AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETEY DIFFERENT

A WEALTH OF ALTERNATIVES FOR THE MORE SELF-CONSCIOUS GAMER

The main thing to remember here is that you never actually need to plug all manner of plastic tat into your consoles – plenty of games offer genuinely brilliant multiplayer modes, some of which stem from the least likely of sources. Naturally, there are games like *Mario Party* and *Kung Fu Chaos* that were designed primarily for four-way use as well as the token four-player genres – first-person shooters, racing and sports games are now produced in the knowledge that not including a multiplayer mode is effectively committing commercial and critical suicide.

The more the merrier

That's not to say such modes are purely space fillers – we shudder to think just how many hours we've whiled away with *TimeSplitters 2, F-Zero, Sensible Soccer* and the like. And of course you could release your pent-up aggression in a good beat-'em-up, out think your mates in *Tetris* or *Puzzle Fighter* and that's before you even get started on the co-operative delights of *Halo* or *Winning Eleven 7*...

Keep it simple, stupid

The main drawback of many multiplayer games is a simple one – a lack of familiarity. Although you may have been brushing up on your *Gitaroo Man* skill for weeks, you can never expect your opponent(s) to pick the game up straight away unless it's particularly accessible. *Super Monkey Ball* is a classic example of this, offering impressive simplicity (both in concept and control) yet enough depth to reward practice and hard work. Naturally, this is not often the case and those games that are so simple to play often offer little longevity.

Deathmatch party

More often than not, for any kind of extended play you really do need to introduce your guests to a game with more substance. Sit them down with a nice drink (or two), run them through the *Halo* or *Pro Evo* controls and then let them loose with a controller. Just don't blame us if you're still gaming into the wee small hours...

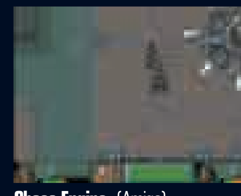
DUST ME OFF

JUST A FEW OF THE CLASSIC TITLES YOU COULD BE REVISITING THIS CHRISTMAS...

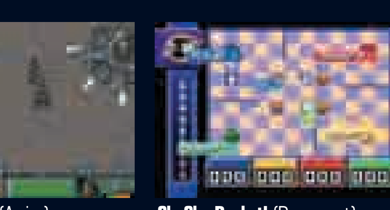
Get the Mega Drive down from the attic, plug in the Dreamcast and find yourself another SNES on eBay – with 20-odd years of retro games to choose from, there really is no end to the multiplayer fun



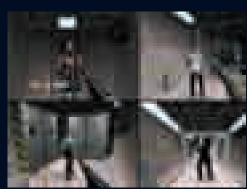
Super Bomberman (SNES)



Chaos Engine (Amiga)



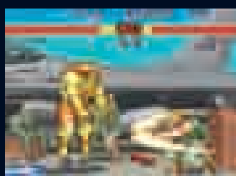
ChuChu Rocket! (Dreamcast)



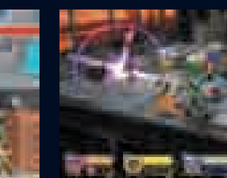
GoldenEye 007 (N64)



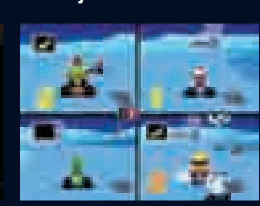
Secret Of Mana (SNES)



Street Fighter II (SNES)



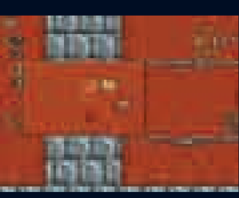
Power Stone 2 (Dreamcast)



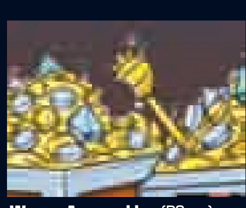
Mario Kart 64 (N64)



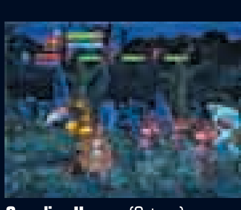
Virtua Tennis (Dreamcast)



Micro Machines 2 (Mega Drive)



Worms Armageddon (PSone)



Guardian Heroes (Saturn)



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"BEFORE THE SUPER BOWL HIS FRIENDS WOULD BE ROUND, AND AS SAME TEAMS AND PLAY THE WHOLE SUPER BOWL ON

John Madden – ignore the buffoonish grin, this guy's a home wrecker.

Meet Angela. A serene, agreeable woman in her early twenties, she is currently working to become a Doctor Of Something To Do With Enzymes at a prestigious Ivy League university. Her closest friends greet her as 'Jelly' and she squeaks with delight at the employment of this pseudonym. She is slight, but drives a sports utility vehicle fit for The Rock himself. If her house were ablaze, evacuation would be delayed just long enough to apply her omnipresent black eyeliner. Angela is also an American Videogames Widow.

I've seen her at many of the social gatherings Mrs Shape likes me to attend, but it wasn't until recently, when fate put her in the seat next to mine, that a story of PlayStation-powered abandonment was laid out for me like a train wreck on the evening news. I felt it was necessary to conduct interviews with Angela in multiple venues and on several occasions, not because a legacy of good genes has blessed her with bewitching Mediterranean looks and a dress size very possibly below zero, but out of my solemn oath to bring tales of US gaming culture to ye dear Britons. Hail Britannia!

Angela's former boyfriend – like you and I – enjoyed playing games; nothing unusual there. But when you hear it from the girlfriend's side, you wonder if perhaps us lifer gamers push things a little too far. It doesn't help ease the cringing any to learn that his main vice was that least femme-friendly creation, the sports sim.

"There were so many iterations," says Angela over a box of her delicious home-made peanut butter cookies. "Him versus his friends, him versus me, me against his friends, his friends versus the computer. Actually, *NBA Street* was okay, you know? Because cool things happen in it. But the serious ones, hockey and *Madden*, those were the worst. He could play the hockey indefinitely." At this point I am transported via cheap screen dissolve to Brodie's basement in the early moments of *Mallrats*. I mention it: she's seen the movie, but doesn't remember the scene. "Before the Super Bowl," she continues, smiling but shaking her head, "his friends would all be round, and as part of the party they'd use the same teams and play the whole Super Bowl on *Madden*. That went on forever. Then they'd be busted out on the football for a while."

Apparently, what really grated was the dreary, uneventful routine that Angela's man fell into later on in the relationship. "Everything would be centred around the game. I'd always go to his house, and he'd be laying there with his shirt off – you know, straight home from work – already playing. Then we'd have to eat dinner around the game." I ask if making plans to eat at a restaurant was ever a successful remedy. "We'd always say we were going to go out, but we never would," she imparts sadly. "Eventually I can't stay awake anymore, there's no point in starting to watch a movie or anything now, and I fall asleep on the floor watching this game. Then he'd be angry 'cause I was



PART OF THE PARTY THEY'D USE THE MADDEN. THAT WENT ON FOREVER"

sleeping. But at least I always knew what to get for birthdays and anniversaries. That was the only thing that was good about it."

A preposterous memory returns, and Angela creases up while telling me just how far things went: "He used to say to me, 'Don't be such a Goomba-face,' when we would argue! Or, 'why are you being such an aggro-Goomba?' And the thing is, he was being serious!" Anyone familiar with the infamous scowl of the Koopa Troopas' perennial fungal warrior will understand the sentiment.

Angela has moved on, but seems fated to end up with deadbeat gamers: the boyfriend before this one had a habit of smoking a little pot before disappearing into *Hot Shots Golf* for hours on end, and the latest guy her friends tried to hook her up with is a major PlayStation nut. I wonder if a penchant for gaming now repels her from the get go. "It's not a red flag, but if it's all I know about a guy, then I won't pursue him. If I've no idea then I'll Google them and look for little gaming tips they've left on message boards!"

A sobering thought for some of us there. And here's a woman scorned not just for SEGA, but for Sony and Nintendo too. You may want to let the lady in your life read this: if she nods a lot, it might be time to spring for dinner and a movie. Perhaps if she sees a little less of the back of your head, you'll see a little more of the back of hers.

Many thanks



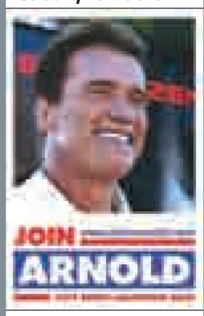
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

The Green Man



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Celebrity Politicians



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

PACKAGE STORE

I only learned this one recently, when in the cinema parking lot a gentleman asked where the nearest package store was. Turns out to be an urban colloquialism for liquor store.



US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Madden NFL 2004	EA Sports	Multi
2	Soul Calibur II	Namco	Multi
3	NCAA Football 2004	EA Sports	Multi
4	Silent Hill 3	Konami	PS2
5	Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	Xbox
6	Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubisoft	Multi
7	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	GC
8	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	GC
9	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar	PS2
10	Chaos Legion	Capcom	Multi

(Updated 9/10/03)



Madden NFL 2004

Soul Calibur II

games™ JAPAN REPORT

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"I NOW UNDERSTAND WHY ALL THE GAMERS IN TOKYO INTERNET HEADPHONES – IT'S MORE THAN COURTESY FOR OTHER PATRONS,



So you want to 'be' in a game? Try a pair of these for size…

When my Japanese friend told me he played all his videogames with headphones, I asked him why. "I don't get home from the office until after midnight," he answered. "My wife is always asleep, so I put on the headphones." I asked him what headphones he used and he showed me his pair of Sony MDR-D22s – affectionately called 'Eggos' because of their ear-hugging, egg-like shape. My friend's particular model is sold in four stores on earth, all of them located on the same street in Tokyo. They also have a platinum-coloured fur trim that goes well with his black suit, black shirt and orange tie. This, of course, bewildered me. You just use the headphones you use for your MiniDisc player? The same headphones? My friend looked at me like this was a strange question. "What other headphones am I supposed to use?" Well, aren't there special videogame headphones, or something? My friend narrowed his eyes at me.

In a few weeks, I'd be trying to play *Metal Gear Solid 2* on my PlayStation2. My apartment in Tokyo is the size of a small car. My bedroom was so tiny I had to sit the 13-inch television between my knees on my futon. At night, I could hear every word of my young married neighbours' arguing. So when *Metal Gear Solid 2* came to me, I took up my friend's habit and shut myself into the world of the game. All it took was a tiny pair of Sony earbuds plugged into my television's headphone jack. Whenever Raiden received a call on his Codec, I pressed my right earbud into my ear and felt like some kind of super-spy.

The problem with my headphones, though, was the cord-length – I couldn't move more than an arm's length from the television. So I hit Akihabara, Tokyo's electronic oasis, containing no less than a million tiny stores devoted to headphones. Some headphones have AV jacks so you can plug in direct to your console's sound output. Many stores sell wireless AV headphones and even more sell a little radio receiver that can turn any pair of headphones into some kind of wireless wonder. I took home a simple pair of stereo headphones with a long cord and played *Metal Gear Solid 2* with a distinct delight.

My senses were awakened that day I first played *Metal Gear Solid 2* with headphones. I now understood why all the salarymen in Tokyo Internet cafés played games that way – it's more than courtesy for their fellow patrons, it's so damned exciting. I told my friend all about my headphone enlightenment the next time I saw him. He nodded as I explained.

So I asked him, what do you like about playing games with headphones? "I love to hear the music as I play," he said. Ooh, good call – I'll need to try some rhythm games. My friend laughed sheepishly. "Well, uh, I play *Dragon Quest VII*. I've, er, got just about every monster job class mastered," he confessed. (To the uninitiated: mastering every monster job



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

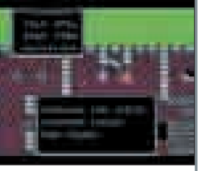
LESSON TEN: WIRED FOR SOUND

Please show me your strongest headphones	Ichiban tsuyoi heddofon wo misete kudasai
Well, these ones are a little easy on the ears…	Kore wa chotto… mimi ni yasashii dakedo…
I don't want to be able to hear anything other than the music	Ongaku shika nanimo kikoetakunai
Turn the volume up a little bit	Oto wo mou chotto ookiku shite kudasai
What? Sorry, I can't hear you	Ee? Sumimasen, kikoenaindayo

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Dynasty Warriors 4	Koei	PS2
2	Grand Theft Auto 3	Capcom	PS2
3	Prince Of Tennis: Sweat & Tears 2	Konami	PS2
4	Drag-on Dragoon	Square Enix	GC
5	Gundam: Encounters In Space	Bandai	PS2
6	Far East Eden II: Manji Maru	Hudson	GC
7	Sunrise World War: Sunrise Hero	Bandai	PS2
8	Legend Of Stafy 2	Nintendo	GBA
9	Zettai Zetsumei Dangerous Jiisan	Kids Station	GBA
10	World Soccer Winning Eleven 7	Konami	PS2

(Updated 06/10/03, ©2003 Media Create Co. Ltd, All Rights Reserved)



Dragon Quest – so much better in close-up…



Dynasty Warriors 4

Grand Theft Auto 3

Prince Of Tennis

CAFÉS PLAY GAMES WITH IT'S SO DAMNED EXCITING"

class in *Dragon Quest VII* requires upwards of 600,000 hours of button-pressing, menu-navigating gameplay. This equals 600,000 hours of listening to the same 32-second battle theme. A Westerner, in my experience, would plug some punk rock or gangster rap into the stereo under similar circumstances, unafraid of waking the neighbours.)

I puzzled over this as I finished my coffee. "See, without the music, I just can't concentrate," my friend rushed to explain. "Headphones – they connect me to the television, to the game. It makes it a more intimate experience." In my experience, the Japanese have acute senses. They'll quickly declare the plainest udon noodles 'too rich'. I can see this principle at work when a man claims he needs headphones to appreciate the music he's been hearing for hundreds of hours in *Dragon Quest VII*. I'm years from that kind of acuity. For now, I'll keep putting Tabasco in my ramen and keep using my headphones (I've got Eggos of my own now) for *Rez* and *Silent Hill 3*. And my mother would tell you I'm not learning anything in Japan…

Kind regards



AN ARM'S LENGTH AWAY

When I got my first Japanese Super Famicom, the length of the controller cord struck me as ridiculous – it's shorter than my arm. With any Western console you can expect to get enough lead-length so you can practically sit on the other side of the room.

Why's it so short? I asked my friend. He shrugged. "Why's the PlayStation2 controller cord so long?" It's a fair point – the Dual Shock 2's cord is nearly three metres long, which, for a Japanese person, is almost a mile. If you ask me, Nintendo's Wavebird controller is the future, but my friend disagrees.

"The cord is what ties the gamer to the system," he argues. "In a cinema, you're sitting apart from the screen, the film continues without your input. A game, though – the controller cord is as much a gaming archetype as the controller itself. It's the needle in the record groove, the sign of love between player and game."

I think you've been sitting too close to the television, I told him. "There was no other way to play the old *Dragon Quests*. The cords were so damned short." Touché.



"SOME DAYS I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY'RE PAYING ME FOR THIS. SURE, IT'S HARD WORK, BUT ANYONE WHO TELLS YOU IT ISN'T FUN TOO IS A LIAR"

JAY WILBUR, EPIC GAMES

JAY WILBUR

EPIC GAMES

Okay, so you've made a great game, but as with any product it takes a huge amount of shrewd business sense and marketing magic if potential is to ever become actuality. While the business side of things is possibly the most overlooked element in the success of a hit title, Epic Games' self-proclaimed "biz guy" Jay Wilbur is keen to play down his crucial role at Epic, and previously with id Software, by insisting all the credit should be levelled at the games themselves. Yet the accolades bestowed upon him during his illustrious career, such as *BrandWeek Magazine*'s Marketer of the Year in 1993, confirm our suspicions that Wilbur did a little more than sit back and watch the likes of *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* become worldwide phenomena all on their own.

"id Software literally started out in the room next to my bedroom," reveals Wilbur, taking us back to the dawn of his 13-year stint in the industry. "I was working as editor on a games magazine, which was where the founding members of id got together – id Software was actually born in the house I shared at the time with John Carmack. We started out as a team of five, and I was the guy who handled anything that wasn't development orientated."

Although many 'biz guys' these days can find themselves somewhat detached from where the magic happens, being part of such a small team at id allowed Wilbur his fair share of input on some of the most groundbreaking titles of all time. "Because id was such a small organisation, everybody had creative input into everything we did," he says. "You can open up *Doom* and pick out plenty of things that were my suggestions."

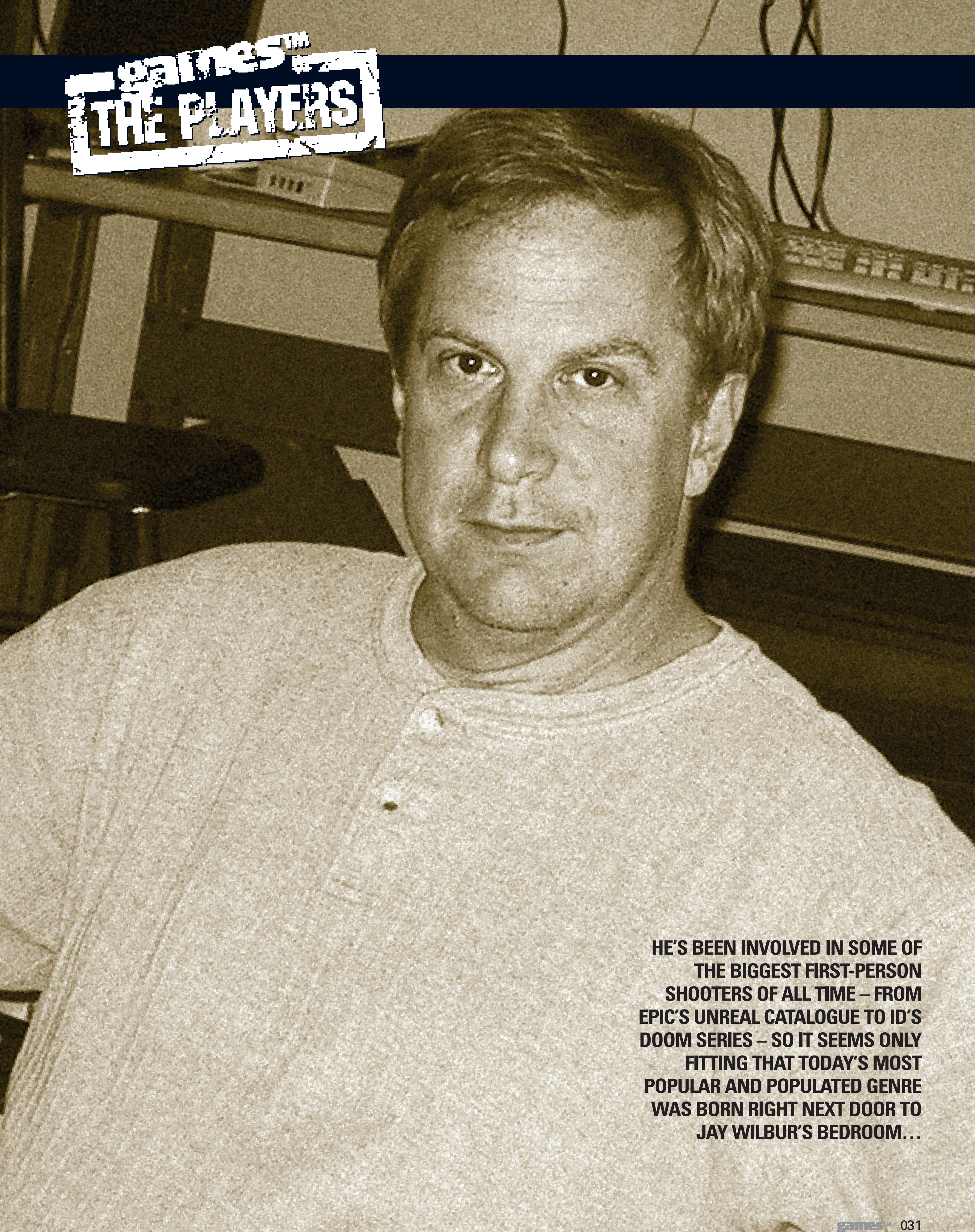
But while some of his influence over id's extraordinary success is evident on screen, it's largely thanks to his tireless work behind the scenes that *Wolfenstein 3D* succeeded so emphatically where earlier FPS efforts had only managed to reach a very limited audience. "At id we did things that were not only groundbreaking from a development standpoint, but also from a business and marketing perspective," says Wilbur. "There were actually a couple of first-person shooters around before *Wolfenstein*, but it was the first one to really drop a giant rock in the pond. I think it was more of a marketing thing – you just couldn't avoid the game. You'd walk into any computer store and it'd be there on all the screens. I remember Gina Smith, who had a really famous radio talk show in the US, saying that *Wolfenstein 3D* was probably the most installed software in the world at the time – maybe even more so than some Microsoft software."

Yet such a rocket ride to success, that saw Wilbur rise from obscurity to being ranked among the top 20 most influential Texans in 1995 by *Texas Monthly* magazine, eventually took its toll on the celebrated entrepreneur. "I don't need to tell you how successful id was, so it was quite a busy job for just one man to manage all that. Between 1990 to 1996 we had gone from zero to grossing $17 million a year, and I realised that if I didn't get help I was going to grab my chest and hit the floor. So I cashed my chips in, bought a farm out in the middle of nowhere and took about a year off. Nowadays, first and foremost I'm a dad to my two kids – and I work for Epic as well."

Working from his home in East Texas, Wilbur is delighted with the role he now plays at Epic. And while he'd again be the first to highlight the calibre of the *Unreal* series as the reason behind the company's rise and rise, his experience of handling such a meteoric journey with id was invaluable to the team at Epic. "When I came into Epic it was beginning a journey of similar trajectory to id," he says. "Life is a set of mistakes and triumphs, and since I'd made a lot of the mistakes already I was able to come in and help Epic avoid a vast number of pitfalls and make sure things were done properly."

Despite having earned the right to give priority to his family these days, Wilbur continues to be driven by the same ambition and passion for gaming that saw him lead both id and Epic from grass-roots beginnings to become two of the most influential developers in FPS history. "Some days I can't believe they're paying me for this," he smiles. "Sure, it's hard work, but anyone who tells you it isn't fun too is a liar."

Unreal Tournament 2004 *from Epic is due out on PC in November, and is previewed on page 42.*



HE'S BEEN INVOLVED IN SOME OF THE BIGGEST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS OF ALL TIME – FROM EPIC'S UNREAL CATALOGUE TO ID'S DOOM SERIES – SO IT SEEMS ONLY FITTING THAT TODAY'S MOST POPULAR AND POPULATED GENRE WAS BORN RIGHT NEXT DOOR TO JAY WILBUR'S BEDROOM…

COMMUNITY

THIS MONTH, **games™** GOES TO THE FRENCH CAPITAL TO VISIT THE HEART OF UBISOFT'S WORLDWIDE DEVELOPMENT EMPIRE



UBISOFT PARIS

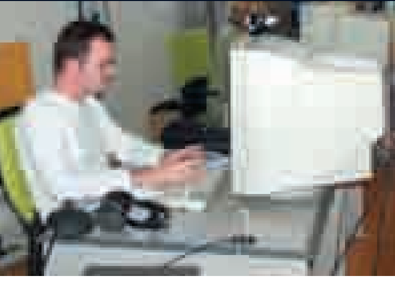
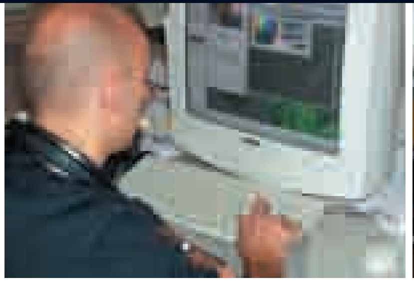
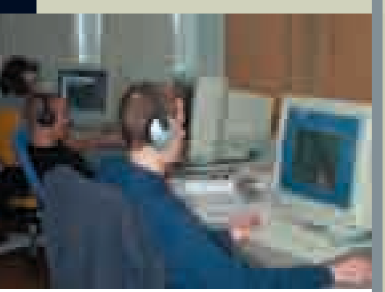
FORGET THE AMERICANS AND THE JAPANESE – IF YOU WANT A BIT OF A COLOUR IN YOUR GAMING LIFE YOU'VE GOT TO GO FRENCH. THE EUROPEAN WAY OF THINKING IS MORE IMPORTANT TO THE GAMES INDUSTRY THAN YOU MIGHT THINK, AS UBISOFT HAS PROVED OVER THE YEARS…

Developers come and developers go, but it seems the French remain the same. If there's one country that's fast becoming renowned for having a strong grip on the games industry, it's France. While still some way off the monopoly held by the US and Japan, the fact that several big-name publishers call it their home is testament to how far the country has come as the industry has grown.

As one of the biggest publishers in the country, Ubisoft has certainly changed a lot over the years, from being 'just another publisher' to a company with development studios all around the world and more triple-A titles coming out for Christmas than many other firms put together. This could, in part, be thanks to Ubisoft's firm standpoint on cross-platform development and its ability to have its fingers in a whole lot of pies (figuratively speaking, that is). 'Exclusive' isn't a word you'll hear too often on a Ubisoft press release, simply because the company wants to reach as many people as possible with its products – even if, sometimes, it takes a bit longer than some might hope…

"The fact is that the decisions regarding exclusivity depend on a lot of factors like marketing, technology and time," says Julien Bares, co-producer of *XIII*. "Essentially though, we plan to develop all our games for all players on every platform. Sometimes, it just takes time to adapt a game between different platforms. With *Splinter Cell*, for instance, we worked at first on Xbox and then, when we had more time, adapted the game for other consoles. There are other considerations too; *XIII* will be multiformat, but the online modes will be available on Xbox and PS2 only, as the GameCube doesn't have any kind of strategy for that yet." Obviously, you'd hardly expect someone high up in the firm to say anything else than the company line and, in that respect, Bares' words ring suspiciously true; there *are* other aspects on which exclusivity can hinge besides the colour of console manufacturers' money. Still, the fact that two of Ubisoft's current big titles became

Based in the heart of the French capital, Ubisoft Paris comprises numerous development teams working on a variety of different projects all at once.

With the Ubisoft Paris studio being just one part of the company's development plan, there's little doubt that the firm is one of the most successful European publishers to date.





The original *XIII* art was suitably cryptic



PlayStation2-exclusive until 2004 practically overnight does prove that some manufacturers will do anything for a killer title at the right time of year, although exactly how much Sony coughed up to snag *Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time* and *Beyond Good & Evil* is open to speculation.

If you're curious as to why *XIII* (Ubisoft's remaining key game for the end of 2003) wasn't picked up as an exclusive by anyone, it might have something to do with the game's origins. Despite being based on a long-running and hugely popular Belgian comic-book series, *XIII* isn't very well known outside its European territory due to the lack of translation – the last attempt at converting the series into English resulted in only three of the 15 volumes available being translated before the publishing company responsible folded. Unsurprisingly, even the development team had their doubts about whether the game would be right for a non-European market at first. "We didn't think the project would be so huge when we first started it," says Jean-Marc Geffroy, Bares' production partner on *XIII*. "The *XIII* licence is very well-known in Europe and, being a European developer, we took the opportunity to pick it up as soon as it came around. Then we realised that the story, being based on the assassination of the president of the United States, was not just one that Europeans could relate to. The plot behind the murder is universal and we realised that the hero, fighting against all to find the truth, would be very popular even if players had never heard of the original comic."

Of course, overcoming obstacles like a lack of knowledge of the subject is par for the course when creating a videogame, but going so far as to actually put obstacles in front of you is something else entirely. Yet that's what Ubisoft Paris did with the decision to take *XIII* down the route of being completely cel-shaded. With the current trend of FPS games being to focus purely on photo-realism (something that Ubisoft's other big FPS title, *Far Cry*, demonstrates in spades), adopting a totally different approach was a risk the publisher was willing to take. "Initially, we didn't want to do an incredibly realistic FPS," says Nathalie Moschetti, artistic director on the *XIII* project, "because although some games like that on the market are very nice, most are not. Our idea was to create a new style within an FPS universe, something that has never been done before. The fact that *XIII* was a comic book to

"SEEING THIS SMALL STUDIO BECOMING ONE OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY MAKES ME VERY PROUD TO WORK HERE"

JULIEN BARES, UBISOFT PARIS

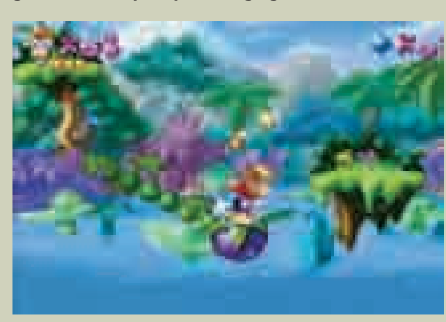


THE TROUBLE WITH TOONS

Ever since the early days of the PSone, Ubisoft has had a thing for creating games in a cartoon style – be they licensed titles based on characters like Batman and Donald Duck, or more interesting original creations like these…

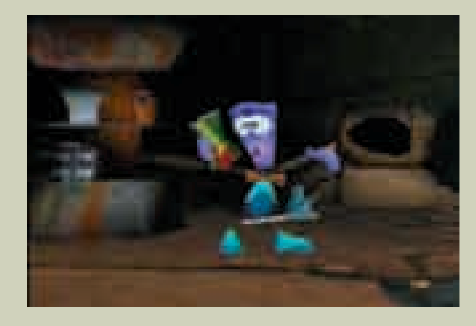
RAYMAN (PSONE, 1995)

The game that launched a multi-million pound franchise for Ubisoft. Having started life as a simple yet fun side-scrolling platform game, Rayman has crossed over into other genres such as racing and even edutainment. Despite the cartoony looks, the game was still pretty challenging.



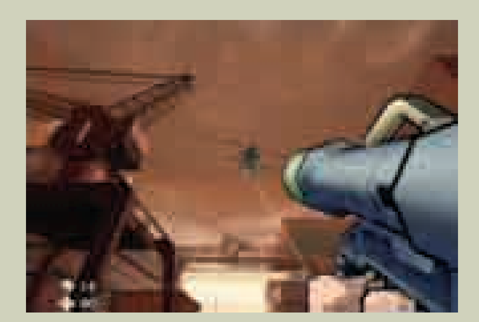
TONIC TROUBLE (MULTIFORMAT, 1999)

The preference for lead characters without limbs continued with this *Mario 64*-style platform romp that, while enjoyable, wasn't the success that Ubisoft might have hoped for. It was also overshadowed by the release of the second *Rayman* game (also a 3D platformer) and was overlooked by most gamers.



XIII (MULTIFORMAT, 2003)

There's a far more adult concept in Ubisoft's latest cartoon-styled title, thanks to a combination of cel-shaded graphics and mature storyline. Based on a long-running Belgian comic-book series, Ubisoft is hoping for big things from this unique first-person shooter – no doubt with plans for a sequel if it's a hit.





"WITH XIII I WANTED TO SHOW THAT CREATING A GAME IN 3D DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN IT HAS TO BE COMPLETELY REALISTIC"
NATHALIE MOSCHETTI, UBISOFT PARIS



Thanks to his broad appeal, Rayman has become a successful franchise for Ubisoft.





Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc also came out of the Ubisoft Paris studio, despite the fact that Michel Ancel (creator of the first two titles) didn't actually work on the project.



begin with was very helpful in getting us out of the realistic 3D game mindset."

That may be, but there's no doubt that cel-shading has been done to death since it first appeared on the Dreamcast – and not always to the same high quality that SEGA employed all those years ago. The fact that some people now have a slightly negative attitude towards cel-shading doesn't appear to have been a concern for the *XIII* team. "For me, the use of cel-shading is not a passé idea," insists Moschetti. "We have used different techniques in *XIII* – such as the use of black and white in the flashback sequences and the 2D onomatopoeias – to create a very unique style. We can innovate by being inventive, by using a bunch of well-known techniques and just thinking different. People need to realise that realistic 3D aspects aren't the most innovative thing and re-using basic techniques isn't the only way of getting things done."

It appears to be this attitude of finding new ways to take on tried-and-tested ideas that is proving to be a huge success for not only Ubisoft Paris, but the whole company – indeed, it only takes a brief

01

02

OOH LA LA

The men (and woman) behind *XIII*'s unique and innovative style

1 JEAN-MARC GEFFROY Producer, Ubisoft Paris. Previously: Worked in Canada as Ubisoft's graphic studio manager, before moving to Milan in a similar role

2 JULIEN BARES Producer, Ubisoft Paris. Previously: Helped establish Ubisoft's Shanghai studio, training game designers and producing Formula 1 games for the PS2

FACING PAGE: NATHALIE MOSCHETTI Artistic Director, Ubisoft Paris. Previously: Has worked for Ubisoft for ten years, starting out as a 2D background designer on a variety of edutainment titles

XIII attempts to create a cel-shaded game with attitude.

glimpse at the firm's past and present titles to see that. Just as *Splinter Cell* took the stealth action/adventure concept to a new plane (above and beyond where *Metal Gear Solid* had already been), so *Prince Of Persia*, *Beyond Good & Evil*, *Far Cry* and *XIII* are all achieving new things within their own genres; something that has surprised a lot of people, considering that all four titles are coming from the same publisher. "I think that the projects we're working on are getting bigger and bigger," admits Geffroy. "We plan to do only huge games, and decide to take the time to do it. Our teams are more experienced too, as the people working on all of our projects have learnt much from developing other games beforehand."

So does the fact that Ubisoft has swiftly become one of the dominant publishers in Europe in less than a decade mean it's the place to be for people looking for a foot up into the industry? Julien Bares certainly seems to think so. "Although it might sound like I'm trying to seduce people into coming to work here, I have to say that working for Ubisoft offers great opportunities," he says. "I've had the chance to work in different countries, with different ways of thinking, and maybe that's why a lot of people here are so open-minded about things. Working with people all around the world forces you to think differently, and that can only be a good thing for all of us."

INSPIRATION, NOT PERSPIRATION

Cel-shading seems to be this year's 'must-have' graphical effect, yet the decision to use the technique in *XIII* wasn't instantaneous and required a fair amount of effort in terms of getting ideas on how to make the concept work. "I must confess we looked outside of the gaming format for inspiration," admits Julien Bares. "Making an FPS cel-shaded has been considered as something that shouldn't be done, but we believed it could. To do it, we had to read a lot of comics, as well as watching TV shows like the original *Batman* shows from the Sixties." Given that original Batman Adam West is the voice of *XIII*'s General Carrington, that doesn't surprise us one bit…



RELEASE LISTS


True Fantasy Live Online Xbox Microsoft's big Japanese hope is just around the corner.


Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg GC Yuji Naka's first original product in years is finally here.


Grabbed By The Ghoulies Xbox Will Rare's first Xbox title deliver the goods?



MOST PLAYED

POKÉMON PINBALL: RUBY AND SAPPHIRE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

We were huge fans of the original Game Boy Color game when it was first released, so now the sequel's here we're in Pokémon heaven. While the latest release will never win any awards for innovation, it's a solid, fun title and that's all we ask.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

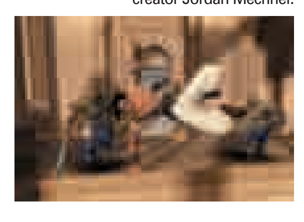
Although we reckon the *Pro Evo* franchise is the best soccer series ever, it's always seemed to pale in comparison to its *Winning Eleven* counterpart. This year, however, things have changed; the differences between the two games are practically non-existent, which is nice.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Ubisoft

There must be something in the water at Ubisoft central, because every game that this publisher has released in the past year has been laced with something special. The long-awaited reappearance of the Prince of Persia is no different and marks a fine return to form for his creator Jordan Mechner.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Batman: The Rise Of Sin Tzu	Ubisoft	
07 November	Broken Sword The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
07 November	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	
07 November	Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance	Acclaim	
07 November	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
07 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
07 November	True Crime: Streets of L.A.	Activision	
07 November	WWE Smackdown! Here Comes The Pain	THQ	
14 November	Bombastic	Capcom	
14 November	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Wanted
14 November	EyeToy: Groove	SCEE Wanted	Wanted
14 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Ratchet & Clank 2	SCEE	
14 November	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Wanted
14 November	XIII	Ubisoft	Wanted
21 November	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
21 November	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubisoft	
21 November	Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubisoft	
21 November	Gladius	LucasArts	
21 November	Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	
21 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
21 November	Hunter The Reckoning: Wayward	Vivendi	
21 November	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
21 November	Metal Arms: Glitch In The System	Vivendi	
21 November	Need For Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	
21 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	Wanted
28 November	Iron Storm	Wanadoo	
28 November	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
28 November	Legacy Of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	
28 November	NBA 2K4	SEGA	
28 November	Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	
TBC	NHL 2K4	SEGA	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Alias	Acclaim	
05 December	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
05 December	Manhunt	Take2	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
19 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Atari	
TBC	Final Fantasy X-2	SCEE	Wanted
JANUARY '04			
16 January	Conan	TDK	
TBC	The X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	R-Type Final	Metro 3D	
TBC	Head Hunter II	SEGA	
TBC	Megaman X7	Capcom	
MARCH '04			
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted



GAMECUBE

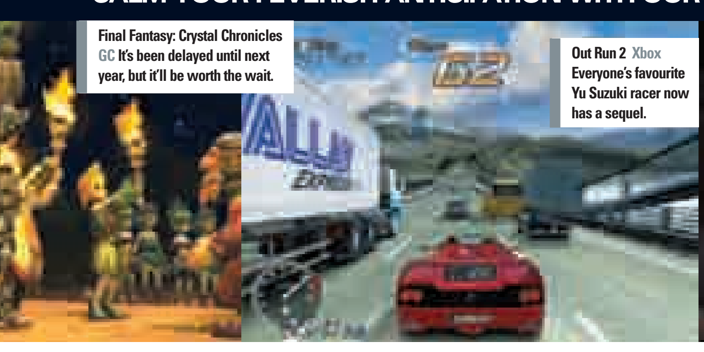
Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg	SEGA	Wanted
07 November	Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
07 November	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
07 November	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	
07 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
07 November	Star Wars Rogue Squadron: Rebel Strike	Activision	Wanted
07 November	True Crime: Streets of L.A.	Activision	
14 November	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	Wanted
14 November	LOTR: The Return of the King	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Wanted
14 November	XIII	Ubisoft	Wanted
21 November	Gladius	LucasArts	
21 November	Metal Arms: Glitch In The System	Vivendi	
21 November	Need For Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts	
28 November	1080° Avalanche	Nintendo	
28 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
28 November	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
28 November	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
28 November	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
05 December	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
05 December	XGRA	Acclaim	
05 December	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
19 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	
FEBRUARY '04			
TBC	Phantasy Star Online Episode III C.A.R.D. Revolution	SEGA	



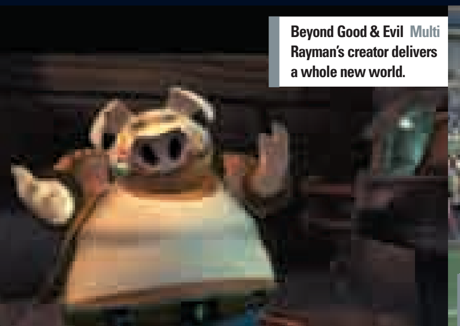
XBOX

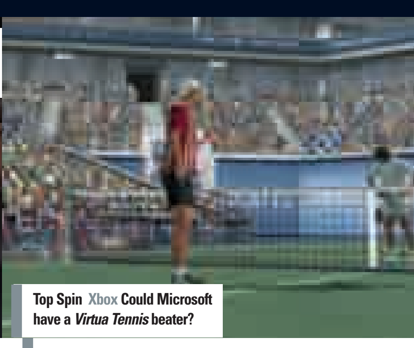
Month	Title	Publisher
NOVEMBER		
07 November	Dead Man's Hand	Atari
07 November	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom
07 November	Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance	Acclaim
07 November	SEGA GT Online	SEGA
07 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles GC It's been delayed until next year, but it'll be worth the wait.

Out Run 2 Xbox Everyone's favourite Yu Suzuki racer now has a sequel.

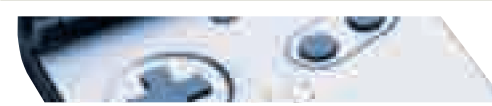

Beyond Good & Evil Multi Rayman's creator delivers a whole new world.


Top Spin Xbox Could Microsoft have a *Virtua Tennis* beater?

Month	Title	Publisher	
07 November	Top Spin	Microsoft	Wanted
07 November	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	
07 November	Xbox Music Mixer	Microsoft	
14 November	Amped 2	Microsoft	
14 November	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
14 November	Dynasty Warriors 4	THQ	
14 November	Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	
14 November	LOTR: The Return of the King	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Wanted
21 November	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
21 November	Gladius	LucasArts	
21 November	Grabbed By The Ghoulies	Microsoft	
21 November	Magic The Gathering: Battlegrounds	Atari	
21 November	SWAT: Global Strike Team	Vivendi	
28 November	Battlestar Galactica	Xbox	
28 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
28 November	Hunter: The Reckoning – Redeemer	Vivendi	
28 November	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
28 November	NBA Inside Drive 2004	Microsoft	
28 November	NHL 2K4	SEGA	
28 November	Need For Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts	
28 November	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
28 November	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Wanted
28 November	Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	
TBC	Legacy Of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	
TBC	Wrath	LucasArts	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
05 December	Counter-Strike	Microsoft	Wanted
12 December	Links 2004	Microsoft	
12 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	
TBC	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	
FEBRUARY '04			
TBC	Headhunter 2: Redemption	SEGA	
MARCH '04			
TBC	Splinter Cell 2: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Breed	CDV	
07 November	Call Of Duty	Activision	
07 November	Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance	Acclaim	
07 November	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	
07 November	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
14 November	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Wanted
14 November	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
14 November	Counter Strike: Condition Zero	Vivendi	Wanted
14 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
21 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
21 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
21 November	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	
21 November	Magic The Gathering: Battlegrounds	Atari	
21 November	Worms 3D	SEGA	
28 November	Alias	Acclaim	
28 November	Far Cry	Ubisoft	
28 November	Legacy Of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	
28 November	Need For Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts	
28 November	Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	Wanted



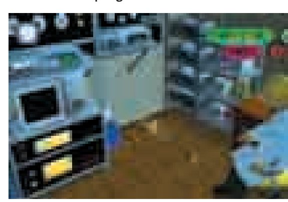
GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	
14 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
14 November	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	Wanted
21 November	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubisoft	
21 November	Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Wanted
21 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
21 November	Star Wars: Flight Of The Falcon	THQ	
21 November	Wings Advance	Zoo Digital	
TBC	Mario And Luigi	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	Wanted
DECEMBER			
05 December	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
05 December	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
05 December	Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	Atari	
12 December	Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts	
19 December	Need For Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts	

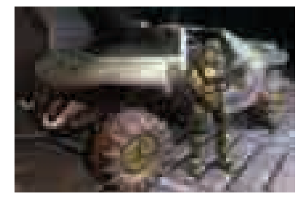
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. We tried ever so hard and may well cry if you get cross with us.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

CHIBIROBO
Format: GameCube
Publisher: Bandai
Ever since we spied Chibirobo's point-and-click antics at this year's E3, we've fallen in love with the little fella. Out in Japan very soon, *Chibirobo* sees you teaching your little robot the do's and don'ts of the house he lives in. It's unlikely to get a release outside Japan, but here's hoping.



HALO 2
Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
After being disappointed with the lack of new footage at Microsoft's recent X03 event, we've gone back to dreaming about what will be in Master Chief's next adventure. Allegedly on target for the end of this financial year, *Halo 2* shouldn't be anything less than amazing when it's finally released.



HAMTARO: RAINBOW ADVENTURE
Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
It's always nice to indulge a little, so after saving the world from a hamster in a devil suit last month, we're now eagerly awaiting our next Hamtaro challenge. *Rainbow Adventure* promises to contain even more phrases, hamsters and sugar-sweet sickliness than ever before. We can't wait.

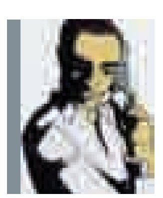




FROM THE FRONT

THE N-GAGE SNEAKS INTO STORES WHILE WESTERN AND JAPANESE GAMERS DO A CULTURAL EXCHANGE

GAMING: A GLOBAL PASTIME

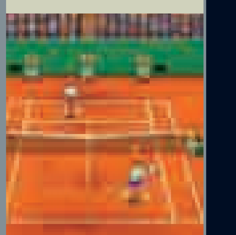


Once upon a time, Western gamers looked to Japan with envy. Their Japanese counterparts had all the best titles and Western gamers were left with a stark choice – take a trip to the importers or pray that one day the game would get a release outside Japan. To be honest, this envy hasn't disappeared and, in my opinion, never should, given some of the originality still coming out of videogaming's motherland. But I do think that these days we're now more likely to be on the receiving end of this jealousy, and that makes a nice change for once.

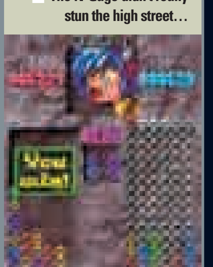
In recent months, we have seen a number of high-profile titles perform extremely well in the West before surprising many industry insiders with their success in Japan. Is this due to a willingness to accept new experiences? Or has a diet of 'me-too' games left Japanese gamers hungry for something more satisfying? Whatever the reason, this is a great opportunity for Western developers and publishers to make in-roads into a market that has been, to a certain extent, a closed shop. Sure, this year's Tokyo Game Show was dominated by Japanese companies, but a number of Western publishers were keen to show their intentions with large stands.

This isn't a call for bland, homogenous titles that don't challenge gamers' expectations and are seen as a safe bet – games that will sell whatever the territory; but rather a challenge to developers and publishers, wherever they hail from, to think about what people want from games. Regardless of where we live, we all have the same desire when we put that game on for the first time – to simply be entertained.

Ben Le Rougetel
Senior PR Manager, Capcom



The N-Gage didn't really stun the high street…



Apparently this is the sort of thing Japanese gamers want these days. Tsk.

NOKIA STEPS INTO THE RING WITH THE MIGHTY SP

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

On 7 October, the talking stopped and Nokia's self-proclaimed contender for the GBA's handheld gaming crown finally appeared in high streets across the land. Despite receiving several scathing reviews, the N-Gage launched amidst ambitious predictions by Nokia that sales of its phone/ console hybrid were planned to reach nine million worldwide in 2004. As expected, however, the culmination of a fairly lacklustre build-up to the launch saw the N-Gage unveiled with more of a fizzle than a bang. First week sales were reputedly very disappointing, with the excuses being a combination of the hefty price, lack of support from console retailers and the inherent shortcomings of the machine as both a phone and a gaming device.

Keen to spoil the party further, Nintendo was quick to announce European sales of its GBA SP had reached a staggering two million units just six months after its release, and promptly adjusted its projections for worldwide SP sales this financial year to 20 million. Nintendo of America's senior VP of marketing, George Harrison, shrugged off the N-Gage as a potential threat to the GBA's current dominance: "We don't view it as a big threat right now," he said. "Our view is that a multi-function device is not the solution." And while Sony's PSP may eventually present a more dedicated challenge, the GBA has quite a head start with its catalogue of titles expected to pass the 400 mark this Christmas.

US AND JAPAN SWITCH GAMING TASTES

TRADING PLACES

It must be good to be Capcom right now – after a relatively quiet period in terms of success, two of its biggest titles have performed better than anyone could have predicted in the space of just one month… and in the wrong countries, too.

First out the blocks was the Japanese release of *Grand Theft Auto 3*. With Capcom securing the rights to publish the game in its homeland, many people (including Nintendo's Satoru Iwata) thought that the company had made a major mistake. Interestingly, though, *GTA3* was snapped up by violence-hungry gamers and went on to sell 74,376 copies on its first day alone, and 125,465 after just three days. By contrast, *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg* (a Japanese-friendly game if ever there was one) only sold 3,072 copies at launch.

Across the pond in the US, the same success was seen with the distinctly Japanese *Viewtiful Joe*. Following a hugely successful pre-order program and favourable reviews from numerous magazines, the game went on to sell out not just from Capcom's online store, but at a number of leading retailers too. Certainly, releasing limited quantities may have been to blame but it still goes to show that both the US and Japanese markets are acquiring new tastes.

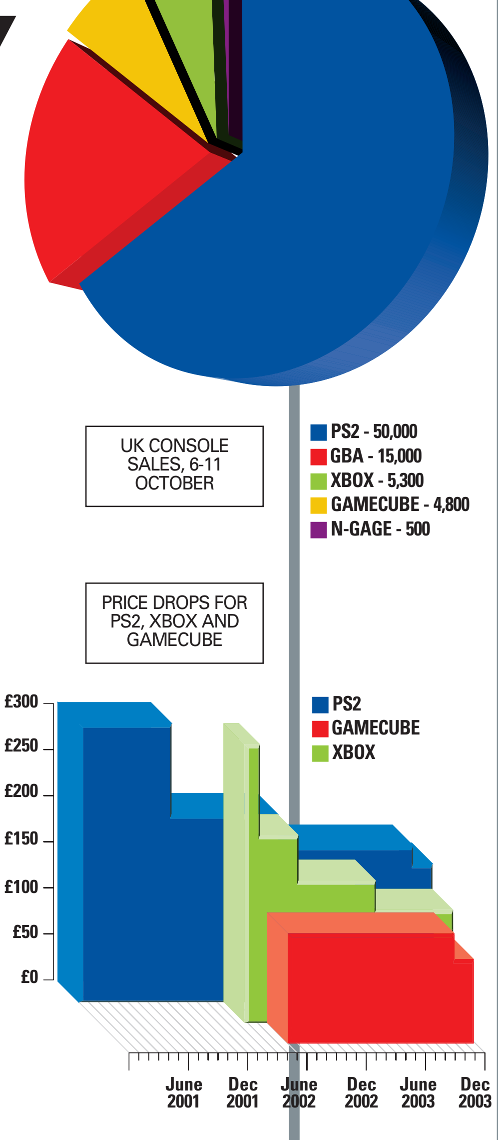
PIE IN THE SKY

HOW LOW CAN THEY GO IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS?

As the weather gets colder the console war has begun to heat up once again, and with each of the big three serving up a feast of must-have titles in time for Christmas, gamers everywhere will be chewing down pencils aplenty as they deliberate which machine to ask for in their letter to Santa. The familiar pattern of market share we've seen over the course of the year was thrown into disarray last month, with Sony and Nintendo both playing their price-cut trump cards in an attempt to further sway that hardware purchase decision. Nintendo launched a particularly aggressive yuletide campaign by slashing the price of the GameCube to just £79.99, making the GBA SP its most expensive piece of hardware on the market.

The move saw major retailer Argos electing to restock the Cube again after famously shunning the struggling console earlier this year and, with such a strong line-up of exclusive titles hitting the shelves for the festive period, Nintendo's machine has never looked so appealing. Nintendo was quick to fan the flames by announcing GameCube sales had increased by 400 per cent in the first two days of the cuts being made on 10 October, yet market leader Sony was still enjoying its own boost in sales after reducing the price of the PS2 to £129.99 just nine days earlier.

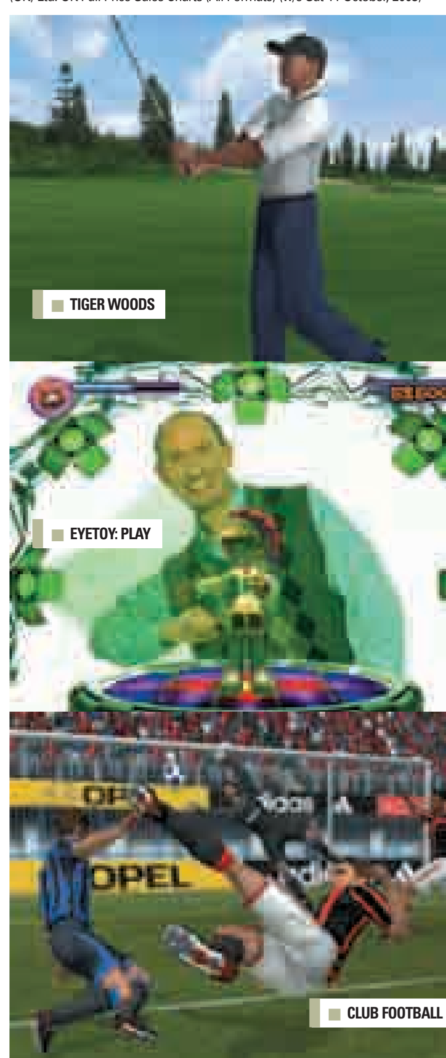
Figures released for the week ending 11 October put Nintendo's celebrations into perspective, showing the PS2 outsold both the Xbox and Cube by ten to one in the wake of its price drop.



UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	EA Sports	Multi
2	Club Football	Codemasters	Multi
3	EyeToy: Play	Sony	PS2
4	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	Multi
5	Soul Calibur II	EA	Multi
6	The Hulk	Vivendi	Multi
7	Formula One 2003	Sony	PS2
8	Halo: Combat Evolved	Microsoft	PC
9	Harry Potter: Chamber Of Secrets	EA	Multi
10	FIFA 2003	EA Sports	Multi

Not surprisingly, the staying power of Mr Woods helps him to hang onto the top spot, with not even the combined might of *Club Football*'s 17 different flavours able to topple him. Of course, with all manner of huge Christmas releases just around the corner, we doubt Tiger's going to be there for very much longer…


TIGER WOODS
EYETOY: PLAY
CLUB FOOTBALL


JAK II
PROJECT GOTHAM



Remember, kids – winners don't do drugs… **NARC Arcade [Midway] 1988**


K.R.A.K

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



Several new weapons have been thrown into the mix for *UT 2004*, and you can now wield two assault rifles at once.

"IN THIS GAME, FAR MORE THAN IN PAST VERSIONS OF UNREAL TOURNAMENT, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY"

MARK REIN, VICE PRESIDENT, EPIC GAMES

The space dogfights are a departure from *UT 2003*, yet feel similar to the on-foot skirmishes.



COMPANY PROFILE

Based in Raleigh, North Carolina, Epic Games was established in 1991 but really hit the big time seven years later with the first *Unreal* game. *Unreal Tournament* followed in 1999 and its cutting-edge engine was licensed out to create the likes of *Deus Ex* and *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell.*

HISTORY

- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003** 2003 (PC)
- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** 1999 (PC)
- **UNREAL** 1998 (PC)

A YEAR IS A LONG TIME IN THE WORLD OF SCI-FI GLADIATORIAL COMBAT

With echoes of last year's superb addition to the *Unreal Tournament* series still ringing in our ears, the prompt appearance of its successor could easily fool cynics into underestimating how far Epic has taken the series in just 12 months. After so many sporting franchises have given the concept of annual upgrades such a bad name by adding little to the previous year's offering, Epic Games' vice president, Mark Rein, is keen to emphasise that *Unreal Tournament 2004* has no such intentions of short-changing fans. "There's actually more new content in *UT 2004* than all of the content that shipped in *2003*," he says, "so anyone who bought the game last year should have just as much reason to go out and get this year's game."

Naturally, *UT 2004* offers more than its fair share of general enhancements across the board – including all-new maps, more OTT weaponry, improved visuals and streamlined bandwidth usage – though perhaps the most exciting addition to the existing formula will be the introduction of vehicles. But rather than simply inserting this futuristic range of buggies, tanks and aircraft into the standard Deathmatch or Capture The Flag scenarios, two new game modes – Assault and Onslaught – have been specifically designed to fully exploit the opportunities offered by vehicle play.

"We had Assault in the original *UT* but we couldn't figure out how to really make it a popular online game for *2003*," Rein admits. "The extra year really allowed us to think it out and come up with some really cool historical battles from around the *Unreal* universe." As before, Assault scenarios task the attacking team with achieving a series of objectives while the defending team attempts to thwart their plans.

One such game sees a team of humans mounting an assault on the Skaarj Mothership, which progresses from a dogfight outside the vessel to a more traditional on-foot skirmish within its corridors once the attacking fighters have managed to land.

It's during the epic Onslaught battles, however, that the new vehicles really come into their own. Each team must attempt to destroy their enemy's Power Core, but it can't even be damaged until a number of Power Nodes are captured around the map in order to create a circuit leading to the Core. Each Node held by a team also spawns a unique selection of vehicles to aid their conquest, and often linking a less direct path of Nodes to the enemy Core will put the more effective hardware at your team's disposal. "You get these great strategic battles over little plots of land around the Nodes you're trying to link up," Rein explains. "Whether you're just playing a small game against a couple of bots or with 32 players online, you always end up with these balls-to-the-wall exciting seesaw scenarios."

Yet while ensuring *UT 2004* brings with it enough new content to justify its existence, the immense popularity of last year's game meant nothing would be introduced at the expense of *UT 2003*'s winning formula. "'If it ain't broke don't fix

"NEW GAME MODES HAVE BEEN SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO FULLY EXPLOIT THE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY VEHICLE PLAY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Epic Games/ Digital Extremes
RELEASE: 21 November
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-32 online

With over twice as many *Unreal* arenas, and mouth-watering vehicle play to boot, *UT 2004* is shaping up to be the ultimate package for online warfare.

TALKING TO YOURSELF

Back in 1999 online gaming was enjoyed by far fewer people than today, hence the original *Unreal Tournament*'s strong provision for single players. Five years on and the enhanced AI means offline bot matches are as much fun as taking on a bunch of real-life foes. A nice addition to offline play this time is the voice recognition system, which lets you issue simple commands to virtual team-mates through a headset. Since teamwork is the key to success in the new game modes, co-ordinating attacks in the heat of battle is now easy without the keyboard commands, and – unlike your online team – the bots should actually do what you ask.



The famous *Unreal* engine returns stronger than ever to lend some stunning visual appeal to proceedings.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 CONT.

it' definitely applies here," says Rein, "so all the existing content from *2003* returns unchanged apart from the minor tweaks and bug fixes we've been including in the patches. That's why we didn't introduce vehicles into the existing game types, but instead created Onslaught and Assault as our 'vehicle vehicles'. You can't just jam stuff in there – you've got to respect what's already there and do it smartly."

Players are effectively provided with a massively varied platter of old and new game types and maps to take or leave as they wish, but Rein firmly believes the additional content more than lives up to the high standards set by the previous *Unreal Tournament* games. "The new content is actually by far the best we've ever done, and I think that's just a natural progression from experience," he says. "*UT 2003* was a brand new engine we were just learning how to deal with, and even though we did such a great job we have a year's more understanding to put into *2004*. There were some real gems among the *2003* Deathmatch maps, but the new maps are just phenomenal."

Similarly, while the new game modes present a fairly ambitious departure from the traditional *UT* gameplay mould, Epic is fully aware of the series' core appeal and fans can be assured the new content sticks closely to its established strengths. "I think our appeal is that we just don't take ourselves too seriously," Rein reflects. "There's a lot of humour in the game with all the OTT gibs and violence, and it's a game that's really easy to get into. You can jump in and play for ten minutes and have all the fun you want, which is great for those of us who maybe don't have the time to devote to really demanding games. You could even stop playing for six months and then jump straight back into it without feeling you've lost your skills or don't remember the controls. It's such an approachable game and I think we've not only preserved that but improved on it with *2004*."

Even when piloting the vehicles, players will find the action as unmistakably gung-ho as ever and should have no problems mastering the controls. "The vehicles capture the same spirit as the rest of the game – they're easy to use and the controls are all the same for whether you're walking, flying or driving," Rein reveals. "What we've been able to do with *2004* is add depth without adding complexity. Just because there are more cool things you can do this time around doesn't make it any harder to play."

Unreal Tournament 2004 looks to deliver a lot more than you might expect from a yearly upgrade, thanks to the retention of the all-action flavour of previous titles and the addition of superb new features. Yet Rein isn't phased by the prospect of people misjudging how much *UT 2004* actually builds on its predecessor, as the opportunity to exceed expectations is something of a rarity in this industry. "What probably puts the biggest smile on my face is that people are totally going to underestimate this game," he says. "And when they do find out how much better this is I think it's going to be a massive sleeper hit that hasn't been over-hyped for a change."

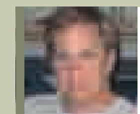
> "UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 LOOKS TO DELIVER A LOT MORE THAN YOU MIGHT EXPECT FROM A YEARLY UPGRADE"

RIGHT PRIORITIES

The key to creating a riveting multiplayer skirmish has to be the map design, yet whilst *UT 2003* brought us some shining examples, Epic's Mark Rein admits that designing the maps in full decorative detail made the task of refining the layout an uphill struggle. "This time we focused on building just the bare bones and terrain of the maps first, then we played over them again and again until we were totally happy with the gameplay flow, so if we had to move an entire hallway it was really easy to do." Putting gameplay first is a commendable philosophy, and from what we've seen of *UT 2004* so far it's a strategy that's paid off in a big way.



With so many new maps to choose from (including those from the last game), there's no shortage of variety for any of the game modes.



CONSULTANT PROFILE

Currently acting as strategic advisor to Epic Games, Jay Wilbur spent much of his time in the gaming industry as co-owner and business manager of id Software. Having overseen the release of FPS legends *Doom* and *Quake*, his experience has been invaluable to Epic's work on *UT 2004*.

HISTORY

- **QUAKE** 1996 (PC)
- **DOOM** 1993 (PC)
- **WOLFENSTEIN 3D** 1992 (PC)

Vehicles follow the same control scheme as basic play, with 'jump' to elevate the aircraft and 'crouch' to dive.

The new game modes recapture the unpretentious 'quick-blast' appeal that has made the series such fun to play.

"WHAT WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO DO WITH UT 2004 IS ADD DEPTH WITHOUT ADDING COMPLEXITY"

MARK REIN, VICE PRESIDENT EPIC GAMES

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES...

UT 2003 x UT 2003 + BATTLEFIELD 1942 = UT 2004

TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE

WILL A CEL-SHADED RPG REALLY CHANGE MICROSOFT'S FORTUNES IN JAPAN?

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Level-5
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (Japan: Q4 '03)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-Unlimited (online)

True Fantasy Live Online is Xbox Live's first MMORPG, and it's also seen by many as Microsoft's best attempt to crack Japan.

Microsoft's Xbox may allegedly be the best-selling128-bit console after the PlayStation2, but that still hasn't endeared it to the Japanese market. With the machine regularly being outsold by the likes of the PSone and Bandai's WonderSwan, and with Xbox software seldom appearing in the Japanese charts, it's hardly surprising that Microsoft's console is in need of a boost in the Far East. With even *Halo* failing to impress, it's little wonder that Microsoft is hoping its first Japanese-developed RPG is going to be its secret weapon in the console wars.

With so much resting on Level-5's shoulders, the developer of the *Dark Cloud* series is naturally playing its cards very close to its chest and has revealed little about its latest title. But what has been unveiled so far leads us to believe that when *True Fantasy Live Online* eventually arrives, it should be more than worth the wait. After the lush visuals of *Dark Chronicle*, we're pleased to announce that *True Fantasy* is shaping up to be an even more impressive feast for the eyes. While the Anime-style cel-shaded graphics are beginning to feel a touch tired, you can't doubt the sheer vibrancy and energy that seems to be contained within every on-screen character. This loving attention to detail is echoed throughout the game world, with the many environments you travel through (be it by camel, horse or boat) looking extremely sumptuous and literally brimming with life.

Of course, there's so much more to *True Fantasy Live* than just pretty visuals; it's the participation with potentially thousands of other gamers that we're most looking forward to. Players will be able to choose two roles for their prospective characters – that of the adventurer and a standard citizen. Typical RPG roles like fighters and mages will be available, but characters will also have access to more mundane professions like a chef or a blacksmith. Hopefully, this dual lifestyle should eliminate the problems in other MMORPGs when the player ends up with an unexciting character that's boring to play.

It's the adventuring aspect that's going to appeal to the majority of players, and with the ability to form parties of up to ten people you can be sure of some frantic battles coupled with healthy doses of teamwork. Should your party get bored of simply moving through the exotic locations and slaying all and sundry, there's always the opportunity to join one of ten different guilds.

Upon joining you'll soon find yourself embroiled in all manner of quests, ensuring that *True Fantasy Live* should always be a fresh experience whenever you log on. If you tire of living as a mercenary, you can always go back to your second profession and simply potter about town for the rest of your days. Once you've decided to set down some roots, you'll be able to buy a house and decorate it with whatever takes your fancy. Another nice touch is that you'll be able to set up a stall in town and then use it to sell any of the items that you've picked up on your travels.

True Fantasy Live Online already has the makings of a fantastic single-player experience, so the ability to join up with fellow Live owners around the world will hopefully prove to be a strong selling point. We're yet to be convinced that Level-5's latest opus will be the turning point in Japan that the Xbox needs, but we're definitely convinced its got the potential to be pretty impressive.

COMBAT, MAGIC AND COOKING

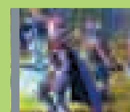
Unsurprisingly, combat will play a large part in *True Fantasy Live* and it looks like real-time battles will be numerous yet straightforward. The visual inventory will allow you to perform various tasks including casting spells. There'll be around 70 spells and you can combine these with your second profession to create endless variations, meaning that no two characters should be the same. Your character's second profession will determine how your on-screen alter ego will eventually look – choose a blacksmith, for example, and you'll soon find yourself with a strong, burly physique.

"WITH THE POTENTIAL OF XBOX LIVE, THIS SHOULD BE AS DIVERSE AS IT IS BEAUTIFUL"



A bustling town is perfectly captured and offers plenty of opportunities to form adventuring groups.

Level-5's inspiration has come from a number of different games; the boats are reminiscent of *Skies Of Arcadia*.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

Formed in 1998, Level-5 Inc is based in Fukuoka, Japan, and headed by Akihiro Hino. Level-5's first US title, *Dark Cloud*, was released in 2000 but was eclipsed by its impressive sequel, *Dark Chronicle*. Buoyed by the success of *Dark Chronicle*, the firm was offered the RPG legacy that is *Dragon Quest*.

HISTORY

- **DRAGON QUEST VIII** 2003 (PlayStation2)
- **DARK CHRONICLE** 2003 (PlayStation2)
- **DARK CLOUD** 2000 (PlayStation2)

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EXPLORING THE EXPANSIVE WORLD OF TRUE FANTASY

DARK CHRONICLE + XBOX LIVE x THE WORLD = TRUE FANTASY LIVE

"NUMEROUS PLAYERS WILL WORK AND PLAY TOGETHER IN ONE OF THE LARGEST MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES CREATED FOR XBOX LIVE"

MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

With so many other players to buy things from, you should never have a problem finding something you want.

Some of the environments on show are simply stunning and are a massive improvement over *Dark Chronicle*.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

EVILDOERS ARE EASIER AND THEY TASTE BETTER…

The first-person RPG is a curious beast. While some firms seem to be able to get the genre splicing absolutely right, others can fall horribly short of the mark. It's a lot to do with the way in which the two (or more, in the case of the more ambitious or foolhardy developer) styles are joined. All too often we see companies simply vying for two different markets with a product that would ordinarily be overlooked in both. Thankfully, not all development houses are out to make a cheap buck by pimping any old nonsense in as many circles as possible. New kid Troika has made a respectable start but is still looking for that one high-profile title that could make it a household name. Don't get us wrong, we're not going to cast aside all reservations and proclaim *Bloodlines* to be a ticket to stardom, but if nothing else it's a damn good start.

As you may already know, the wonderful visuals you see before you come courtesy of Mr Gordon Freeman – *Half-Life 2*'s central programming is given a vastly different assignment outside of the long-awaited sequel. It's not purely cosmetic either and the impressive physics that the Valve tech demos have been so keen to highlight are in full effect here. The gritty LA cityscape provides an impressive amount of freedom, from exploring buildings and slums to venturing down into the sewers and beyond, and if early impressions are anything to go by, the claims being made as to the level of non-linearity in the game could very well be true.

Being an RPG rather than an out-and-out shooter, your initial choice of clan has a much greater impact on the game that it may first seem. In addition to unique skills and attributes for each available group, your character will determine how you'll need to play the game. Obviously, for some the game will be a more gung-ho experience, but with options for stealth, trickery, disguise and diplomacy all a possibility depending on your chosen form, the game experience can vary greatly from player to player. Much like *Deus Ex*, problem solving is tackled similarly and regardless of skills or race there are often many ways to reach your ultimate goal. Such opportunity for individual play is obviously one of the trump cards in Troika's hand and so long as it plays it well it should work wonders in the game's favour.

It's still a fair way off, but even so *Bloodlines* already has a lot going for it. Few can call into question the technology that Valve has slaved over and combined with the number-crunching minds of the little-known RPG development wizards. This could well be one of the dark horses of next year before you even take into account the enormous potential of the announced online multiplayer options. The PC will have more than its fair share of shooters as we move into 2004 so it's always pleasing to see titles like this, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and *Thief 3* pushing the genre in new directions. Without such innovation, this increasingly popular style of game (outside of Japan, at least) would be in a very different state today…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Troika Games
RELEASE: TBA 2004
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

Bloodlines boasts creatures of the night, freedom and the Source technology behind *Half-Life 2* to great effect in this first-person RPG.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE

You know an engine is destined for great things when firms are fighting over it before the game it was designed for is even released. Such is the case with *Half-Life 2*. The Source technology that powers physics and AI in the Valve title is already hot property, and it's not hard to see why. On top of the obvious benefits, Troika's use of this core system has numerous little-known advantages. For one, the technology allows for dynamic lip-sync – a major plus for such a dialogue-heavy game. We're only guessing here, but big money says *Bloodlines* won't be the last title to make the most of Valve's hard work.

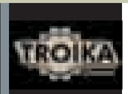
"WITH STEALTH, TRICKERY AND DIPLOMATIC OPTIONS ALL A POSSIBILITY DEPENDING ON YOUR CHOSEN FORM, THE GAME CAN VARY GREATLY FROM PLAYER TO PLAYER"



For some clans, stealth is all-important. Luckily, this guy isn't part of one of these clans…

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

PC



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Founded in 1998 by the creators of popular RPG franchise *Fallout*, Troika Games specialises in role-playing games and is converting many tabletop favourites into digital form. A relative newcomer to the development scene, this could be one firm for the stat-happy to keep an eye on…

HISTORY

- **VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE: TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL** 2003 (PC)
- **ARCANUM** 2001 (PC)

■ Never let it be said that the undead aren't snappy dressers…

■ Expect plenty more dark and gothic settings like this to be littered around the finished game.

"BLOODLINES ALLOWS PLAYERS TO EXPLORE A SOPHISTICATED CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN AN OPEN, NON-LINEAR REALM"

LARRY GOLDBERG, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, ACTIVISION WORLDWIDE STUDIOS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GETTING TO THE HEART OF BLOODLINES

SYSTEM SHOCK × HALF-LIFE 2 + BLOOD OMEN = V: TM – BLOODLINES

■ Ick. And you thought the regular vampires were pretty sinister…

PIKMIN 2

IT'S TIME TO BECOME A PLEASANT PIKMIN PLUCKER AGAIN

If there's one thing we love about Nintendo's GameCube, it's the diversity of its games. From the kinetic eye candy of *Viewtiful Joe* to the simian antics in *Super Monkey Ball*, something appeals to everyone. So when Nintendo revealed that it would be returning to one of the most innovative games the GameCube has seen, we were definitely interested.

Despite our love of the original *Pikmin* we couldn't help feel that certain parts of the game – especially that disjointed third level – seemed somewhat rushed. As a result, the game's initial illusion of exploring a foreign environment was quickly shattered. *Pikmin*'s strict time limit also served to frustrate many players, so Nintendo has made quite a few changes to the game's basic mechanics for this sequel. When you grab a Pikmin, you can now cycle through the various types before you throw it. In addition, the time limits have been abolished (although you must still herd your Pikmin together at night), there are around 60 new enemies and the game now features a co-operative mode.

It's this new mode that offers the most potential to fans of the original game, mainly because it enables you to solve problems much more quickly. Should you end up playing on your own, you can switch between Captain Olimar and his new sidekick by simply pressing the Y-button, thus enabling you to take herds of Pikmin in different directions and cover even more ground. Finally, there's the option of playing against an opponent in a fully revitalised Challenge mode. With 30 unlockable levels and plenty of sub-sections *Pikmin 2*'s longevity is assured.

As well as new gameplay modes, *Pikmin 2* also heralds the arrival of two new Pikmin – a stocky purple fella and a rather freaky-looking albino. Nintendo has yet to reveal the new Pikmins' abilities so we can only guess as to what part they'll play in the finished game. Players might be disappointed that the sequel's visuals don't seem to have improved much, but there are enhancements to the original game engine and, if possible, it now looks even more organic. Let's just hope the gameplay remains intact…



■ We've no idea what special abilities the White and Purple Pikmin have, but they're bound to be cool.

"WITH ADDITIONAL MODES AND A HUGE SELECTION OF ENEMIES, IT APPEARS THAT NINTENDO HAS LISTENED TO PIKMIN'S FANS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
RELEASE: Q2 '04 (US: May '04)
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ Nintendo revisits one of the Cube's first unique titles and fills in the gaps from the original game.



■ There are plenty of disgusting enemies to encounter – Nintendo is promising around 60 new creatures.

■ *Pikmin 2*'s levels are just as organic as their predecessors, giving the game a unique look.


eMag

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES



Even if the visual style isn't to your taste, it's hard not to be impressed by the sheer vibrancy of the graphics.

"IT'S FLUID AND FAST-PACED COMEDY VIOLENCE ALL THE WAY"

RAREWARE WEBSITE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DO THE MASH, DO THE MONSTER MASH

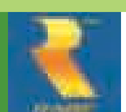
ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBOURS + BLADE - CACK = GBTG

As scary as it may look, this is actually Cooper's girlfriend after a shock. Calm down, pet…

Many items can be used as weapons, which makes Ghoulie clobbering all the more fun.

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

XBOX



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Rare really doesn't need any introduction. Founded by Tim and Chris Stamper in the late Seventies, the company was initially famous for creating such classics as *Jetpac* and *Sabre Wulf*, before being part bought by Nintendo and developing a string of SNES and N64 hits, including *GoldenEye*.

HISTORY

- **STARFOX ADVENTURES** 2002 (GameCube)
- **GOLDENEYE 007** 1997 (Nintendo 64)
- **DONKEY KONG COUNTRY** 1994 (SNES)

CAN RARE'S FIRST XBOX GAME LIVE UP TO THE QUALITY WE'VE COME TO EXPECT?

Following Microsoft's much-publicised buyout of Rare last year, the games industry has been awaiting the debut Xbox offering from this once Nintendo-exclusive developer. Although the first titles to be confirmed were *Conker Live And Uncut*, *Kameo: Elements Of Power* and *Perfect Dark Zero*, it's the pun-tastically entitled *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* that will mark Rare's Xbox bow.

Unveiled at E3 in May, many were disappointed with *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* as the visuals and the gameplay were unusually simplistic for a Rare title. This perhaps wasn't surprising for a game that had been in development for no more than six months, though we had to wonder why Microsoft should decide to unveil it in such an incomplete state. However, it soon became apparent that this fledgling title was actually a lot further into development than anyone could have dared to predict, and that the planned release date was a mere six months down the line. That was six months ago…

Having played the preview version for a good few weeks now we can reveal that while it's highly unlikely that this will set new standards in gaming excellence, it appears that Rare may have actually created something that both hard-core and casual gamers will find amusing. Through clever use of comic book-style cut-scenes, the clichéd storyline of two young lovers lost in the rain introduces the players to the haunted mansion where all the action takes place. Just like *Banjo-Kazooie* (and a number of Nintendo's in-house creations) the characters communicate with suggestive grunts and grumbles, rather than real language. These comedy sound effects combined with a typically tongue-in-cheek script result in a convincing cartoon atmosphere that few games can claim.

Unfortunately, the gameplay in the preview version doesn't come close to matching the impressive front-end polish. The mansion is broken up into various rooms and areas, and the main crux of the gameplay is simply to beat up the patrolling Ghoulies before moving onto the next zone. This is made somewhat more interesting by additional rules that dictate the number and type of Ghoulies that need to be destroyed before you can move on, as well as which weapons (if any) you'll have at your disposal. However, these are only slight variations on a theme and it isn't long before the whole thing becomes utterly repetitive.

Matters are made worse by a poorly implemented control system that uses the right analogue stick to attack with decidedly spongy results. With any luck this will be addressed before release, though the almost-complete nature of the preview code would suggest that very little will have been adjusted in the final game.

As it stands, it would seem that *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* will reassure the industry that Rare knows exactly how to make a product that appeals to the buying public, even if it no longer has the ability to create cutting-edge games. For the benefit of those who spoke badly of the company after its split with Nintendo, it's interesting that Rare's first Xbox release shares so many similarities with Nintendo's *Luigi's Mansion*. Ironically, even in its incomplete state, this is already the superior game.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Rare
RELEASE: 14 Nov (Japan: TBC, US: Nov)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

■ Control Cooper as he explores a haunted mansion in order to save his girlfriend, but instead finds all kinds of disturbing Ghoulies.

SHENMUE GHOULIES

Although most levels in *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* revolve around beating up monsters with whatever comes to hand, stages are occasionally broken up with interactive cut-scenes. Although the player has no control over where Cooper walks during these segments, various bits of the scenery spontaneously spring to life, frightening Cooper and bringing with them a string of required button presses listed as icons at the bottom of the screen. Providing these are pressed promptly and accurately, Cooper calms down and is able to carry on. These sections are similar to the Quick Time Events seen in SEGA's *Shenmue*, although they're a little more light-hearted here.

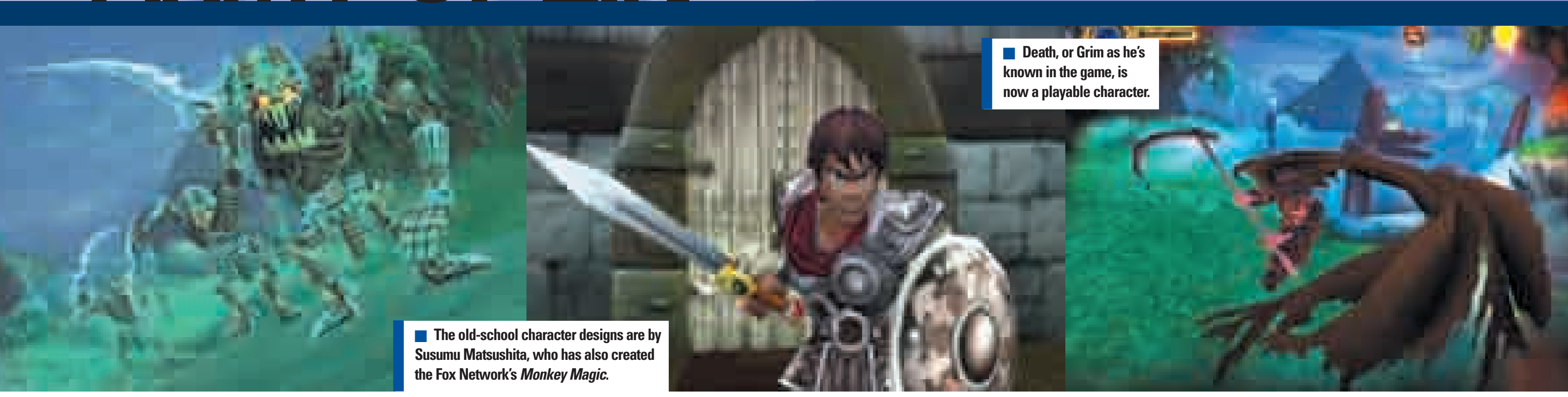
"IT APPEARS RARE HAS CREATED A GAME THAT BOTH HARD-CORE AND CASUAL GAMERS WILL FIND AMUSING"



■ Levels are broken up with interactive cut-scenes. Press the right buttons and Cooper lives.

■ As unfair as it may seem, dying instantly by the touch of Death himself is hilarious.

MAXIMO VS ARMY OF ZIN



■ Death, or Grim as he's known in the game, is now a playable character.

■ The old-school character designs are by Susumu Matsushita, who has also created the Fox Network's *Monkey Magic*.

CAPCOM'S GHOULISH CULT PLATFORMER RETURNS

Many would argue that apart from a return to classic platform gameplay and an 'old-school' learning curve, the original *Maximo* was really just an excuse for Capcom to prove that it was the best in the business at creating original, stylised characters. So what do we expect from a sequel to a game that revelled in old-fashioned gameplay and stylish visuals? More of the same? Well, yes and no. Though the same colourfully crafted worlds and characters return (once again designed by Anime guru Susumu Matsushita), the gameplay has been reworked to entice more casual players into its fold.

Linear maps and level structures replace the old hub system. This means there's no re-treading of old ground as in the original – movement is constantly forwards. After a number of levels in which you hack and slash at screens of fantastically designed robotic creatures, a battle with a boss takes place and then it's on to the next set of missions. In terms of game structure, it has to be said that this is something of a step back.

However, in terms of game design there's much to admire in *Maximo Vs Army Of Zin*. The RPG elements of the original, for instance, have been bolstered considerably for the sequel. There are now over a hundred weapons, armours and items to buy, all with specific powers that enhance Maximo's combo potential, and this ultimately gives meaning to collecting the hundreds of coins scattered through the levels.

The lavish graphics that made the original so much fun are also back, including the shock of having scenery collapse in real time – sections of the ground shake and fall away under your feet to deliver evolving dynamic worlds. This doesn't occur as much as before, but when it does the effect is still as dramatic as ever. Combat has also been improved. The original was renowned for its harsh responses and unless you were pin-sharp with your defending you came a cropper. This time around, there's more leeway for error and though you still need to fight with some degree of tactical thinking, the advantage certainly lies with you, the player.

Again, as with the level structure, there is a strong sense that Capcom is repackaging its retro-tinged platformer for a more casual gamer. The original sold a healthy but not earth-shattering quarter of a million copies. But so long as the character and level designs remain so much fun, where's the harm in inviting a few more people to the party? The more the merrier…

"THERE IS A STRONG SENSE THAT CAPCOM IS REPACKAGING ITS RETRO-TINGED PLATFORMER FOR A MORE CASUAL GAMER"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: November (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Platform Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Capcom's cartoon revision is far more accessible than the hard as nails original, even if this new, more linear title may deter purists.



■ New armour and weapons affect Maximo's combos. There are dozens of moves to master.


eMag

BC



Learn to hunt and you can eat the local wildlife. You might want to take a pot shot at your hairdresser while you're at it.

As well as learning skills and abilities, you can breed naturally adept hunters, warriors or mystics to suit your needs.

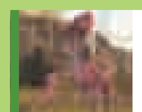
As your tribe's thinking evolves, more effective tools and weaponry can be crafted from the world around them.

"GAMERS WILL DISCOVER AND CREATE A MULTITUDE OF DEADLY WEAPONS USING NATURALLY OCCURRING MATERIALS"
MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

EARLY MAN + DINOSAURS x INITIATIVE = BC



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Founded in 1999 by former Bullfrog employees Joe Rider and Matt Chilton, Intrepid became the second of Lionhead Studios' satellite developers. Microsoft signed up the London-based team to produce *BC* exclusively for Xbox, an ambitious and original project being keenly overseen by gaming industry legend Peter Molyneux.

HISTORY

■ BC is the first title to be developed by Intrepid.

INTREPID PROMISES US A YABBA-DABBA-DOO TIME IN THE EVOLUTIONARY RACE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Intrepid
RELEASE: TBA '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Intrepid takes away our futuristic plasma cannons and pits us against the dinosaurs with just our initiative. God help us…

It's been in development for some time now, but this hotly anticipated offering from the Molyneux camp is finally beginning to take shape. *BC* transports players millions of years back in time to the very dawn of humankind – to a period when earliest man had yet to harness any of the intellectual potential that would eventually see the human race distinguish itself from the rest of the animal kingdom. In fact, it's something of a mythical age where humans share the earth with the kind of fearsome dinosaurs that would have been long extinct before Neanderthal man was even a twinkle in our simian ancestors' eyes, but for the purpose of a much more interesting setting we're quite happy to overlook the historical inaccuracies.

The presence of T-Rex and his ferocious reptilian buddies only adds to the obvious difficulties your plucky band of humans will face in their battle for survival, placing them a few rungs further down the food chain than they would have been in reality. Even more reason then for you to get that evolutionary ball rolling as quickly as possible, a process that will eventually see your tribe's primitive brains lead them to a far greater standing in the ecosystem than the limitations of brawn alone could allow.

At the outset of the game your people will have nothing more than their innate animal instincts with which to cobble together the basic food, water and means of defence they'll need to stay alive in such harsh times. We're promised this uncivilised world will play host to some brutal melees of primeval savagery as humans are forced to hunt and avoid being hunted by incredibly primitive means. Even the crudest skills must be learnt from scratch, from which fruits are fit for human consumption to the value of a sharpened stone as weaponry. But gradually you'll lead the human race on an epic journey of discovery that will see them learning to use the various opportunities within the environment to overcome the everyday challenges they face. This is where the ambitious Molyneux-esque level of depth comes into play as you freely explore the sprawling landscapes, interacting with the gaming world in any way you see fit.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *BC* is the living world of fully interdependent ecosystems Intrepid has meticulously recreated within the game's settings. Complex food chains of creatures from the smallest insects to the most formidable dinosaurs wage their individual battles for survival around the game world, each creature autonomously behaving in accordance with the innate tendencies they've been programmed to exhibit.

Here is where your tribe of humans can begin to exploit the logical effects of their actions on the natural world. Meddling in the food chain at any level will inevitably start a chain reaction that throws the entire ecosystem into crisis, preferably at some advantage to your people. Deforestation, for instance, strikes at the very heart of the chain and will not only see the local herbivores moving on to pastures new, but also creates a knock-on food shortage for any of their natural predators.

With endless scope to influence the world around you and evolve the simplest of technologies from nothing, *BC* certainly promises to be an absorbing and rewarding journey.

TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE

Potentially the most inspiring aspect of *BC* will be the step-by-step learning curve that will take your tribe from clueless beasts to a functional unit of human beings. The environment is filled with multiple opportunities to exercise your initiative, and leading by example you'll teach your followers to logically use certain objects to achieve certain results. For instance, while attacking a flock of Dodos with your bare hands may get the job done to some extent, rolling a boulder down a slope at the group is a prime example of early abstract thinking that might kill more than one bird. And with any luck it will inspire the rest of your party to use this more productive method for themselves next time around.

> "FOOD CHAINS OF CREATURES WAGE THEIR BATTLES FOR SURVIVAL AROUND THE GAME WORLD"



■ Humans aren't the only ones fighting for their next meal – every creature has its own survival agenda.

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

FROM THE SANDS OF IWO JIMA TO THE SHELVES OF YOUR NEAREST STORE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: EA LA
RELEASE: 11 November
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ Exactly like the other *Medal Of Honor* games, but this time you get to shoot Japanese people for a change. Woo, and if you will, hoo.

If the previous *Medal Of Honor* game is remembered for anything, it must be the opening level – D-Day, 6 June 1944. Say what you like about the rest of the game, or how you really preferred the controls in *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, it doesn't matter, since your first time up Omaha Beach will have definitely got to you. Fair enough, after a few attempts you worked out the scripted events and suddenly what was total war became a fun ride, but you can't deny that for an opening level of an EA game, it hit hard and fast. Now we look to *Rising Sun* for more *Medal Of Honor* action, but this time the European theatre has been swapped for the Pacific. And instead of an opening inspired by *Saving Private Ryan*, we get one that takes its cues from the Ben Affleck smarm-a-thon that was *Pearl Harbor*.

But now is not the time to hide behind the sofa like a veteran stalked by invisible Japanese snipers – it's going to be okay. Moving the *Medal Of Honor* franchise to the East brings with it some rather interesting new ideas. Firstly, you're fighting the Japanese. This has forced EA LA to come up with AI routines that, if seen as racial stereotyping, could be described as dubious at best. The Japs are sneaky, you see, and they don't give up easily, being quite willing to use a bayonet should they run out of ammunition. They also know the art of concealment and so can appear magically as if from nowhere. Like we said, sneaky.

Of course, *Rising Sun* is more than just the old game with new skins and level designs… Actually, current play tests of some early unstable code suggest that everything that makes a *Medal Of Honor* game recognisable against a million other first-person games has remained intact. Welcome back then to the irksome targeting method and mechanical controls, but this time used with *The Bridge On The River Kwai* as a background, amongst others. Then again, this is a franchise we're talking about (and one by Electronic Arts at that), so we can't really expect a total overhaul. What we get is more of the same, but with this season's players resplendent in their new kit… er, we mean it has a co-op mode that allows two to share the horror of jungle warfare.

EA is keen to remind us that this time there are multiple paths through the ten levels. Interestingly, it also finds the game's realistic environment rendering (capable of making trees look believable, foliage seem pliable and water that looks wet) worthy of a bullet point on its press release. Of course, all this is meaningless when we can actually play the game and see for ourselves. First impression? Pearl Harbour is in danger of becoming an opening level that will live on in infamy. Waking up on a ship that's been hit, running through corridors and then using 50-calibre machine-guns to down Mitsubishis feels extremely workmanlike. It's like the opening of *Halo*, but without the Covenant. Walk through, grab big gun, clip planes and see them burst into flames, and without even a sniff of Kate Beckinsale.

Obviously, *Rising Sun* will be a critical game for EA to get right. *Frontline* made people realise that EA doesn't just make updates of sports games, and *Rising Sun* could well turn that around unless it lives up to, or betters, its predecessor. We have every hope that this will come to pass.

PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE

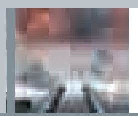
December 7, 1941 – Japanese forces attack the US naval fleet at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. This is *Rising Sun*'s equivalent of Omaha Beach, which is currently as nerve-wracking as watering the garden. Thankfully, the game moves on through the Pacific theatre, including a stop in Guadalcanal where you must destroy a gun emplacement. Stolen gold must be found in Singapore, you meet up with the Flying Tigers in Burma and you can even blow up a certain bridge near a river called Kwai. It's the deep forest levels that give the game its unique flavour, though. Bag yourself an elephant…

> "RISING SUN NEEDS TO BE AS GOOD AS, IF NOT BETTER THAN, ITS PREDECESSOR IF IT WANTS TO HAVE ANY HOPE OF KEEPING THIS SERIES ALIVE"



■ Everything has been polished, tweaked and improved since *Frontline* – expect much better AI and set pieces this time.





PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ EA LA handles the more cinematic of EA's titles. It's had control of the *Medal Of Honor* franchise since *Frontline*, where Tarrnie Williams took over as senior producer. Mr Williams continues to oversee all *MOH* games with his own take on child-friendly realism and Hollywood derring-do.

HISTORY

- **LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS** 2002 (Multi)
- **MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE** 2002 (Multi)
- **007: AGENT UNDER FIRE** 2001 (Multi)

"EA WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR SOCIETY TO ENSURE RISING SUN REFLECTS THE IDEALS OF THE PRESTIGIOUS MEDAL OF HONOR"

EA PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IT'S FRONTLINE, BUT WITH AN ASIAN TWIST

FRONTLINE + THE THIN RED LINE x CAPTAIN DALE DYE = RISING SUN

■ The variety between levels is particularly noteworthy, jumping from intense mounted sequences to tense jungle warfare.

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.



Street crimes appear at random, but you don't have to solve them, especially if the suspect doesn't want to come quietly.

THE CITY OF ANGELS JUST GOT ANOTHER DIRTY FACE

DETAILS
FORMAT: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Luxoflux Corp.
RELEASE: 7 November
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

It's not just another *GTA* clone…

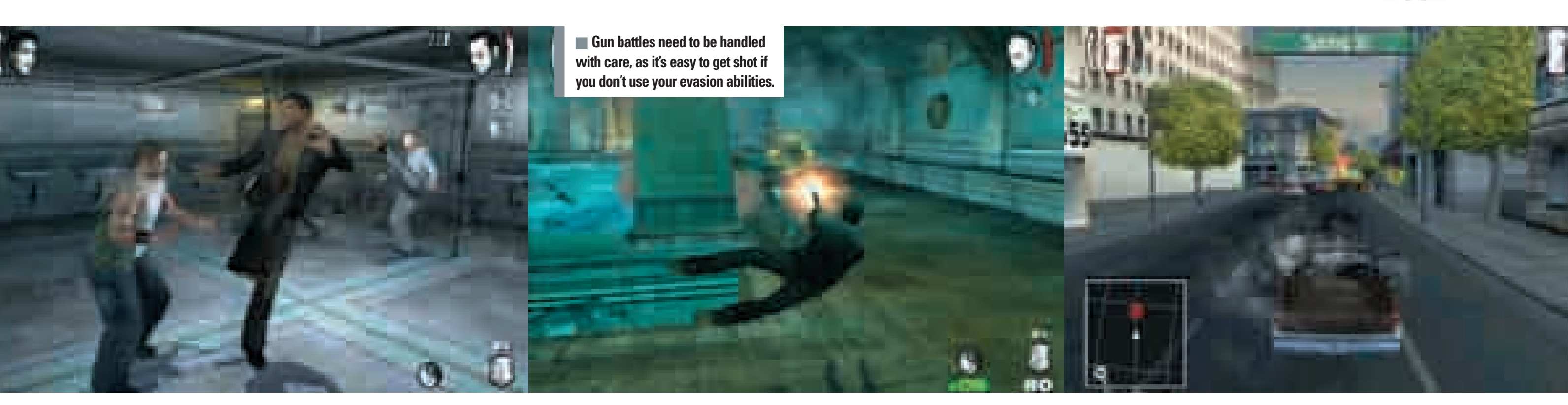
PS2 **Right, let's get one thing clear – if you've think that *True Crime: Streets Of L.A.* is going to rain all over *GTA*'s parade, you're wrong.** Not in the sense that it won't be worth playing, of course, it's just that despite bearing more than a few similarities to Rockstar's now almost godlike series (in the eyes of the public, at least), *True Crime* is somewhat deeper when it comes to its gameplay. And yet, it's not. Confused? You should be.

If you're looking to make a direct comparison with *True Crime*, you really need to think of it as more like *Max Payne* with cars and *GTA* elements, rather than just a *GTA* clone. This isn't a bad thing, it just means that the game progresses in a different way. Chapters are split into a number of missions, many of which have to be completed before you can move on. But it's not just a case of being successful. Even if you fail a mission, you can continue the story and live with the consequences, usually leaving you at a disadvantage but with more rewards if you do well later.

There's also an element of freedom involved when attempting to complete the tasks set for you. Not only can you spend your time visiting 24-hour dojos and your friends at the LAPD to earn upgrades to your fighting and gun skills in various mini-games, but there's the small matter of Street Crimes to solve. These pop up randomly and usually involve you chasing suspects in cars and/or beating people up before arresting them – the more you do, the more Shield Points you'll get to spend on upgrades.

> "IT'S NOT BAD, BUT INTRUSIVE LOADING TIMES AND SEVERAL FLAWS MAKE US WONDER IF THIS WILL BE ALL WE'RE HOPING FOR"

Of course, as we've only had preview code so far (and with the game on the shelves by the time you read this), we've got some concerns. The on-the-fly loading isn't as smooth as it could be and the camera occasionally makes things hard to see when the action gets close up. We're also slightly worried that, intriguing storyline aside, *True Crime* plays in part more like a collection of mini-games joined together with driving sections – thanks to the horribly intrusive autosaving and loading screens, the action is broken up too often to stop you getting totally absorbed. Hopefully, some of this might be sorted out when the game is released but we won't count on it.



Gun battles need to be handled with care, as it's easy to get shot if you don't use your evasion abilities.


eMag

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND



Stats now build up as you perform certain objectives.

Your created boarder can be quite individual, but bare feet?

STILL DON'T KNOW YOUR TRUCKSPINS FROM YOUR HANDPLANTS? READ ON…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
RELEASE: November
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-2 (PS2: 1-TBC online)

Tony and the extreme crew take to their boards once more as the popular skating series takes an ambitious leap in a new direction.

PS2 **Birds were singing, there wasn't a cloud in the sky and just when we thought life couldn't get any better, who should come strolling down the garden path but the friendly neighbourhood postman.** We frantically peeled back layers of paper and bubble wrap and our hopes were confirmed – the first playable build of *Tony Hawk's Underground*. It's still unclear just how many hours were lost before the realisation hit us like a ton of invisible lead soup – this demo code was limited to just the first three areas, up to the point where your street hero lands his or her first sponsorship deal. Naturally, we were left in a frail state, gagging for more, but this soon gave way to a feeling of real accomplishment. Allow us to share with you the outcome of our extreme 'research' thus far…

In addition to the structural overhaul (Career mode centres around your created would-be star's rise to fame), the combo potential this time around is more impressive than ever before. New moves and links such as the Wall Push and Caveman (leaping straight into a combo from a running start) open up a virtually infinite number of lines around the expansive play areas. Leaving your board mid-sequence brings up a small timer and provided you get back to tricking before this runs down, the multiplier remains intact and the move continues.

It may not seem like much but a little exploration goes a long way. Leaping off your board and scaling an otherwise impassable obstacle before dropping straight into another high-scoring trick can result in a feeling of achievement seldom found in gaming, especially when the resulting score hits seven or even eight figures.

Unfortunately, as good as *THUG* promises to be, there are still a few black clouds hovering above it. The driving sections, while a praiseworthy inclusion, are simply awful to control at the moment, and the balance of non-skating goals in the early stages is far from perfect. The on-foot sections would be similarly disappointing were it not for the excellent implementation and integration thereof – the leaping and climbing around is anything but precise, though the extra freedom this ability grants more than makes up for it.

We'll have to wait and see just how these problems are addressed in the final version (if at all), but problems or no, *THUG* is set to be the next evolution of all things extreme.

> "REWRITING THE EXTREME RULE BOOK SEEMS TO BE TOP OF TONY'S AGENDA THIS TIME"



If you thought the combos were crazy in *THPS4*, you really ain't seen nothing yet…


eMag

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES



"THE INTERFACE IS QUITE DIFFERENT – IT'S VERY ACTION-BASED AND I THINK IT'S GOING TO PROVIDE SOME NEW FLAVOUR TO THE GAME"

AKITOSHI KAWAZU, PRODUCER, SQUARE ENIX

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

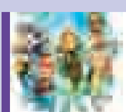
LIKE A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED MANA WATER

SECRET OF MANA + GBA LINK-UP + TEAMWORK = FINAL FANTASY

■ The Crystal of your Mirula jar has to be charged with the right element in order to get through the Mana forest.

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

GAMECUBE



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Formed in April 2003 after the merger of Square and Enix Corporation, Square Enix has two of Japan's best-selling RPG franchises under its direct control – *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest*. Although nothing has been announced, a game combining the two series is still the holy grail for fans worldwide.

HISTORY

- ■ **FINAL FANTASY X-2** 2003 (PlayStation2)
- ■ **UNLIMITED SAGA** 2003 (PlayStation2)
- ■ **SWORD OF MANA** 2003 (GBA)

THE GAMECUBE FINALLY DISCOVERS THAT IT'S HIP TO BE SQUARE ENIX

Whether you're familiar with classics like *Gauntlet* and *The Chaos Engine* or more modern examples like *Phantasy Star Online* and *EverQuest*, the concept of slaughtering monsters, exploring levels and generally 'adventuring' as a team is one that never fails to appeal. And despite the onset of the online age, where people can work together despite being hundreds of miles apart, the atmosphere that comes from crowding around the TV and shouting at each other when there's trouble afoot is one that can't be beaten. As stalwart believers that games should be the most fun they possibly can be, we're pleased to see that whoever came up with the basic idea behind *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* obviously feels the same way.

Of course, those of you who suddenly pricked your ears up at the words '*Final Fantasy*' should probably be warned that *Crystal Chronicles* is a far cry from the other games in the series. Okay, so it's certainly no less atmospheric and stylish – the locations are lush and the music is as symphonic as ever – but with a real-time battle system and stage-based gameplay the game has more in common with Square's *Secret Of Mana* than any of the other *Final Fantasy* titles. This is no bad thing, although fans who've jumped on board the series bandwagon since *FFVIII* might have something to say about it.

Thanks to its simple-yet-effective control system, *Crystal Chronicles* is deceptively easy to get to grips with whether you're using a controller or a linked-up GBA to play. Attacking, defending and using spells is done through a combination of the A-button and the shoulder triggers, leaving the B-button context sensitive depending on the situation (everything from reading signs and activating switches to picking up items and searching suspicious places). Although some may be wary of such a basic interface, it's something you'll appreciate when single-handedly facing off against a horde of mine-dwelling Goblins.

While the game is certainly enjoyable played alone, it comes into its own when experienced with three friends. The requirements might seem a little excessive – everyone has to have their own GBA and GameCube link cable – but it's necessary, with each player getting a piece of the puzzle on their own screen. It's all about making players communicate with each other; one may get the map of the level, while another has the locations of all the monsters and a third can see where all the treasure is hidden. Combine that with having to watch each other's backs and share responsibility for the Mirula jar (the only thing protecting you from the poisonous fog filling the world), and co-operation becomes essential if you want to succeed.

But even though we're already primed to sing the praises of Square Enix's first GameCube effort, the fact that *Crystal Chronicles* still isn't due for several months in the US, let alone Europe, is one that has us suitably vexed. There's no doubt we're loving every minute of the Japanese version, but not being able to understand much of what's going on is a bit of a pain. Having advertised the game as 'coming soon' last Christmas but not delivering until at least Easter next year, and with the GameCube needing some new triple-A titles sooner rather than later, we can't help wondering what Nintendo is playing at…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: The Game Designers Studio
RELEASE: Q2 '04 (Japan: Out Now, US: 9 Feb '04)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ *FF* hits the Cube in an RPG with more beauty, depth and innovation than we've seen in ages.

STACK 'EM HIGH

You'll have to work as a team when taking on monsters, particularly when they get bigger and more numerous. Thankfully, one of the more interesting aspects of teamwork in *Crystal Chronicles* is the ability to 'stack' attacks on top of one another in order to increase their power. By charging up strikes and then placing their target markers on top of each other, you can release attacks together. This works particularly well with magic attacks, as combining similar spells results in a stronger version – though opposed spells cancel each other out, so co-operation is the key.

"AS WELL AS BEING ENJOYABLE AS A SINGLE-PLAYER ADVENTURE, THIS GAME OUGHT TO BE PLAYED WITH FRIENDS"



■ Boss battles need a lot of aggression, particularly when playing alone. Though teamwork doesn't help much either.

■ Rankings at the end of each stage prioritise who gets the best rewards. The better you do, the nicer the swag.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04

SI'S MASTERPIECE PREPARES FOR ITS FINAL APPEARANCE IN EIDOS COLOURS

With *Championship Manager 4* still sitting majestically at the top end of the PC charts some eight months after its release, it may seem a little soon for its successor to be already limbering up on the touchline. Yet the world of football has undergone so many changes since March in terms of promotions, relegations and a hectic summer in the transfer market that the original *CM4* has become massively out of date. *Championship Manager: 03/04* is much more than a mere data update, however, as this first sequel since the introduction of so many new features gives Sports Interactive the chance to build on the fresh foundations it laid with *CM4* and the flagship 2D match engine. Most avid fans of the series will no doubt have already downloaded the latest of five free enhancement packs SI has released to remedy the inevitable imperfections with *CM4*'s ambitious new engine, and with gamers similarly spoiled for choice in the availability of unofficial data updates how does *03/04* still manage to justify its price tag?

While the customary sprinkling of intriguing new features we've come to expect from annual *CM* sequels once again enhances general play in a number of areas, the simple truth is that we're most looking forward to the officially revised database. Yes, we're currently running the most recent download that some fanatic cobbled together in their bedroom, but no matter how accurate and stable this data appears to be, the 2,500 worldwide scouts SI has on the case puts things into perspective somewhat. Despite the relatively short space of time since the last game, today's climate presents a completely different playing field to that portrayed in *CM4*. Besides the obvious matter of divisional switches, changes in the financial fortunes of certain major clubs has made starting up a *CM4* game with virtually any team hugely inaccurate – how many Chelski fans would feel inspired to manage their £100-million-lighter squad of eight months ago?

Perhaps most essential to the game's authenticity is the intricate updating of statistics for more than 200,000 players. The most appealing aspect of *CM* has always been its parallel with the real world that allows managers to draw on their current footballing knowledge to make inspired signings, but the talents of many promising young players had yet to be recognised back in March. Realism is equally crucial in the way games pan out using the 2D match engine if managers are to successfully base their tactical approach on real football, and constantly refining the flow of play beyond issues addressed in the enhancement packs ensures AI player movement and decision making in *03/04* noticeably exceeds that seen in its predecessor.

Aside from the all-important tweaks to the action on the pitch, most of the debutant features are assigned to further developing the modern-day significance of management off the field (see boxout). A host of other trivial yet inspired additions include Goal of the Month awards, the ability to save match recordings and a good helping of fine-tuning across the interface. Sadly, the enforced withdrawal of all US leagues and players from the equation for legal reasons has placed a rather hefty chink in the armour of an otherwise mouthwatering first step forward from *Championship Manager 4*'s inspired groundwork.

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive
DEVELOPER: Sports Interactive
RELEASE: 21 November
GENRE: Sports Management
PLAYERS: 1-16

With refinements and greater depth, *03/04* brings things right up to date for the new season.

EMOTIONAL TIGHTROPE

Introduced by *CM3* as more of a gimmick than a serious strategic element, media interaction and player personalities have been stepped up a gear in *CM4*'s first sequel. Vastly enhanced interrelationships between all parties mean your publicised interest in signing a player will evoke mixed reactions from your own squad and may even unsettle the target himself. Similarly, as part of a major effort to make all the game's dialogue much more context sensitive, stories in the media will detail the relevancy and historical background of events, while your scouts will now report back on a player as to how they would fit into your current team both tactically and emotionally.

"HOW MANY CHELSKI FANS WOULD WANT TO MANAGE THEIR £100-MILLION-LIGHTER TEAM OF EIGHT MONTHS AGO?"



One interface that's more user-friendly is the training system, with all elements now on the same screen.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04

PC



SERIES PROFILE

Sports Interactive released the first *Championship Manager* game in 1992 through publisher Domark (now Eidos), followed by a series of annual updates and periodic fully revised sequels. Sadly, the 11-year partnership is to be severed after *CM: 03/04* with SI retaining the vital game engine and Eidos taking custody of the *CM* brand.

HISTORY

- **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4** PC (2003)
- **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 3** PC (1999)
- **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2** PC (1995)

Goal of the month results are a nice touch – an account of the scoring highlights the beefed-up dialogue.

Match dynamics have been constantly refined to more authentically represent the flow of real football.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

AFTER THE REVOLUTION

CM4 - US TEAMS x NEW SIGNINGS = CM: SEASON 03/04

DYNASTY TACTICS 2



Few forces could stand up to the might of Cao Cao's verbal abuse and mockery.

Tactic animations show off some impressive visuals and vary nicely from unit to unit.

WELCOME BACK TO THE STAGE OF HISTORY

No matter how many *Three Kingdoms* games Koei turns out, we're consistently amazed with how well the series does in Japan. With *Dynasty Warriors 4* still riding high in the Dengeki charts (with over a million copies sold to date) and its update faring very well at review, it seems surprising that such success hasn't carried over into other territories. Nonetheless, Koei continues to bring the ever-solid titles to the UK and it would appear that the games' following is growing with each release. Harking back to the original *Three Kingdoms* games rather than the frenzied one-man-army *Dynasty Warriors* formula, this second batch of *Tactics* could keep that fan count rising.

Although superficially very similar to the first game, a fair amount has been done to the game's core, most noticeably the battles. In particular the Combo system has been tweaked to make combat a much more strategic affair. In the previous game, it was all too easy to trigger attack chains accidentally or, similarly, be caught unawares by an opponent's move set. With greater emphasis on carefully planning these attacks, the '*Tactics*' part of the title rings that much truer. Presentation and overall aesthetics have barely changed since the original, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Despite some fluctuation and the functional battle graphics, the general standard is fairly good, especially in comparison to similar titles.

It's not all about fighting, either. The World Map sections offer a staggering amount of options considering the nature of the game. Keeping your forces well-staffed and acquiring the services of local free agents is essential for success, although the many menus also serve up some more diplomatic routes to victory. Espionage, sabotage and negotiation are all perfectly acceptable alternatives to spilling some blood.

About as far removed from the *Dynasty Warriors* series as a game could get (apart from sharing the same creative basis), this complex and intricate strategy title won't be at the top of Joe Public's Christmas list, but to fans of the genre and story, *Dynasty Tactics 2* should be something of a blessing. With several difficulty levels to cater for all standards of player, a full tutorial on rules both new and old, and four separate campaigns, this latest *Three Kingdoms* outing owes more to its 8- and 16-bit predecessors than anything else.

Provided the rest of the game is given the same attention that we've seen in the early stages, *Tactics* could turn out to be a decent PS2 strategy game – a rare commodity indeed.

> **"THIS LATEST THREE KINGDOMS OUTING OWES A LOT TO ITS 8- AND 16-BIT PREDECESSORS"**

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Koei
RELEASE: November (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-2

Koei invites you back into the *Three Kingdoms* storyline with another healthy dose of thinking and numbers. Come on, don't pretend you're not interested.



Fans of the series rejoice – Lu Bu is still as horribly powerful as ever.


eMag

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE



Kain remains suitably blood-thirsty, with a fighting style that matches his brutal personality.

TWO VAMPIRES, ONE GAME, NO COINCIDENCE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2/Xbox/PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics
RELEASE: 28 November
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Join Raziel and Kain for vampire antics around Nosgoth as they team up to fight evil.

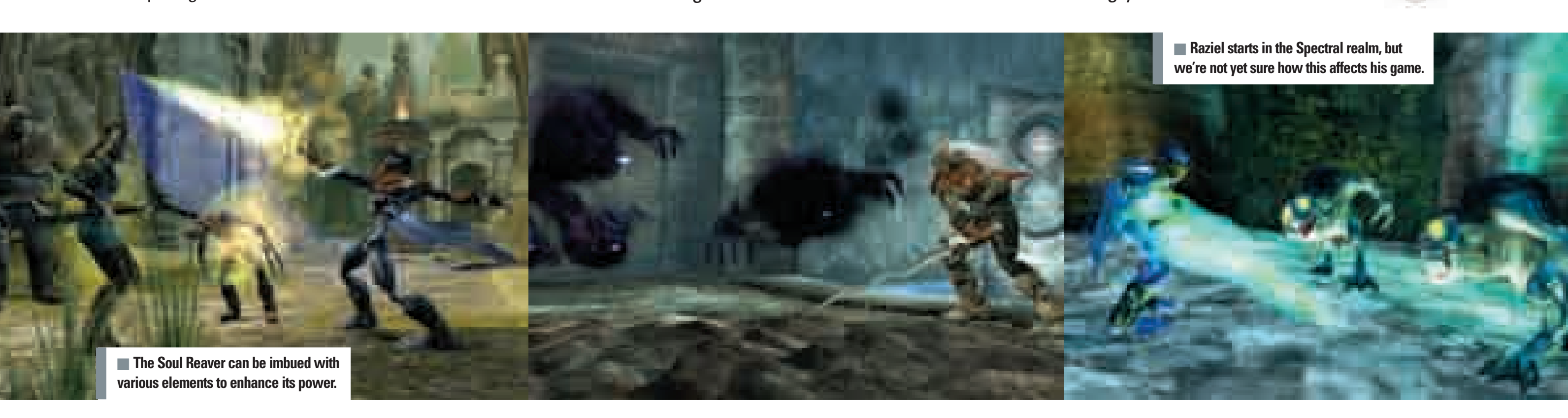
"ALL THE USUAL ELEMENTS ARE HERE, BUT THE CAMERA ANGLES MAKE FOR SOME CONFUSING AND FRUSTRATING MOMENTS"

PS2 **While most game franchises plod ever onwards solely to make money, only a handful continue because they've actually got a story to tell.** Few current games tell a story that's enjoyable for the duration of one game, but a couple of franchises have managed to sustain a good plot over a number of titles. If you're a follower of the *Legacy Of Kain* series you'll know that it's one of these elite few. Having left us on more than one knife-edge in its time, the appearance of the fifth game in the series couldn't have come soon enough, but will it finally give the fans all the answers?

Not surprisingly, Crystal Dynamics is keeping its cards close to its chest on that score, with the (rather early) preview code we played only giving us a taster of what the plot has to offer. Essentially, it now revolves around Kain and Raziel as they struggle against the evil powers holding them back from their destinies. This means that players get to control the two characters alternately through different levels around the land of Nosgoth. Starting in different locations, it's up to you to bring the pair together by solving puzzles, clambering across platforms and slaughtering anyone that gets in your way (something that will ring bells if you've played any of the previous games).

Despite being graphically superior to its predecessors and with controls more akin to the *Soul Reaver* games than the disappointing *Blood Omen 2*, the one thing we're still unsure about is the new camera system. Certainly, the use of set camera angles rather than placing it behind Kain or Raziel gives the game a much more cinematic look than previous instalments, but it also creates some confusing moments. Landing certain jumps and negotiating terrain hidden by obstacles looks to be more of a hit-and-miss affair at times, while the main character is often reduced to a dot on the landscape when running into the background.

But we're hoping Crystal Dynamics will iron out some of these flaws in time for the ominously close November release. If they don't, we can expect a lot of angry Kain fans…



The Soul Reaver can be imbued with various elements to enhance its power.

Raziel starts in the Spectral realm, but we're not yet sure how this affects his game.


eMag

OUT RUN 2



■ Just like the original, *Out Run 2* has a vivid colour palette, though now it's almost photo-realistic too.

■ Multiple views will be included, though at this stage it's unclear just how well these will work.

AFTER A BREAK OF ALMOST TWO DECADES YU SUZUKI'S POPULAR ARCADE RACER IS BACK

DETAILS

FORMAT: Arcade
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: AM2
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Q4 '03, US: TBC)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ Resurrecting the classic atmosphere of an Eighties arcade but with all the style of *GTA: Vice City*, *Out Run 2* offers high-speed thrills.

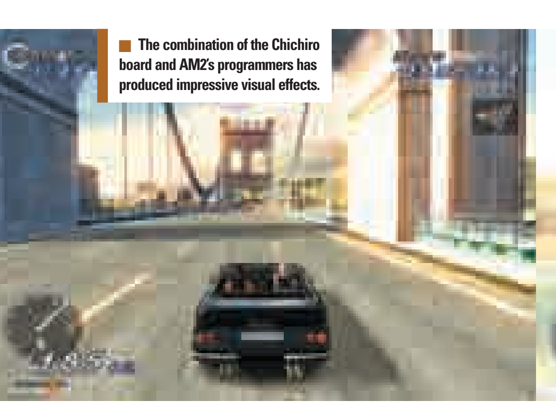
All last year there were rumours that Yu Suzuki was planning to resurrect his 1986 arcade classic, *Out Run*. Although development wasn't confirmed at the time, by Christmas it was obvious that something was going on. Then a few months ago, SEGA revealed that *Out Run 2* was indeed in production. Details are still scarce, but this is already looking to be a promising sequel.

Firstly, there'll be a choice of three game modes – Out Run, Time Attack and Heart Attack – each offering a slightly different take on the classic theme. While Out Run and Time Attack are self-explanatory, the new Heart Attack mode adds *Crazy Taxi* elements to the mix. As you speed through the game your lovely lady passenger demands that you perform various tasks (such as powerslides and jumps), in turn rewarding you with Hearts. Upon completing the game, these Hearts are added up to decide which of the multiple endings you'll receive.

> "OUT RUN 2 WILL KEEP SEGA FANS HAPPY, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO ENJOYED BURNOUT 2"

Aside from such neat gameplay innovations, much of *Out Run 2* will remain similar to the structure of the original. The course layout is nigh-on identical, with players offered a choice of two routes at the end of each stage (provided they reach all the checkpoints, of course). Fifteen stages will be included, though at the time of writing just six have been revealed: Palm Beach, Alpine, Deep Lake, Desert, Coniferous Forest and Castle Wall. There'll also be a selection of seven fully licensed Ferraris, from older models such as the Testarossa through to the new Enzo. And on top of that you'll be able to choose between realistic or drift handling, with the latter being a lot like *SEGA Rally*.

It looks like *Out Run 2* will keep SEGA fans happy, as well as attracting anyone who enjoyed *Burnout 2*. Unfortunately, a home translation hasn't been confirmed, and may even be impossible as EA holds the Ferrari licence. If it does go ahead, though, it's highly likely that the Xbox will receive the first conversion, due to the console's similarities with the Chichiro arcade technology. Look out for further updates soon.



■ The combination of the Chichiro board and AM2's programmers has produced impressive visual effects.

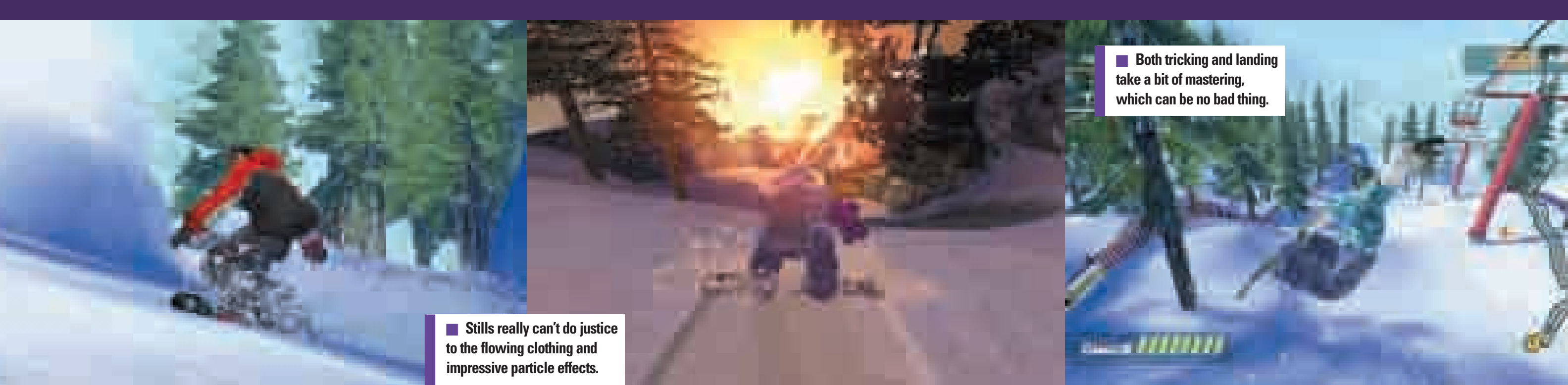




■ Four cabinets can be linked up for four-player action, though this feature may not appear in the UK.


eMag

1080°: AVALANCHE


Both tricking and landing take a bit of mastering, which can be no bad thing.

Stills really can't do justice to the flowing clothing and impressive particle effects.

CONCLUSIVE PROOF THAT DELAYS AREN'T ALWAYS A BAD THING

Never let it be said that Nintendo doesn't learn from its mistakes – more so than ever where *1080°* is concerned, it would seem. After the game's lacklustre first showing, it has taken feedback from several trade shows and a change of developer (not to mention thousands of man-hours) to get this extreme sequel back on piste.

But for all the ongoing technical improvements and gameplay tweaks, it doesn't take a genius to see that the visuals have struggled to keep up. Promising a solid 60-fps frame rate and already throwing around some impressive animations and details, the finished package will almost certainly fall short of EA's colourful *SSX 3*, which will have been warming shelves for several months by the time *1080°* joins it.

Falling somewhere between the exuberance of *SSX* and the pseudo-realism of *Amped*, *1080°* features mostly believable courses and trick opportunities with slightly more arcadey control than you might expect. This does make big tricks a little easier to execute than fans of the original may like – the triple spin, for example, isn't as much of an accomplishment as it was previously.

Much of the game is based around the Match Race mode, although those who prefer a more leisurely jaunt can take it at their own pace in Trick Attack mode, among other diversions. At the moment, the selection of characters is far from mind-blowing – five boarders make up the opening cast and while they do seem varied enough (as does their equipment), we've been spoiled recently by *SSX 3*'s cast of over 40 riders.

At the moment though, there are two real aces up *1080°*'s beautifully animated sleeve – multiplayer and set pieces. With *SSX 3* also offering some degree of multiplayer action (although only the PlayStation2 version supports online play), *1080°*'s four-man shenanigans (single console or network play, LAN fans) stand a chance of taking the crown in this area of the genre, having left us pleasantly surprised after our last play.

Better still are the latter highlights of the staged events – this is where the titular avalanches come into play. Whether you're a fan of the game or not, there can be no denying the thrill of speeding away from a massive snowfall or leaping through buildings and other such destructible scenery. If the game can be slanted more towards these strengths before release we can see opinions of it being more favourable, but either way *Avalanche* has come far enough to give EA's over-the-top slope slider a run for its money.

“IT'S COME ON WONDERFULLY BUT THERE ARE STILL A FEW MORE HURDLES TO GO”

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: NST
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (Japan: TBC, US: December)
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4

Like so many Nintendo franchises, the original snowboard racer gets a 21st Century update for this new instalment.



The picture-in-picture display is a nice way of letting you know who (or what) is on your tail. If it goes completely white, panic…


eMag

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

JOIN THE DARK SIDE

Format:	PC
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Vivendi Universal
Developer:	Monolith
Release:	Q4 '03
Genre:	FPS
Players:	1 (Multiplayer Online)



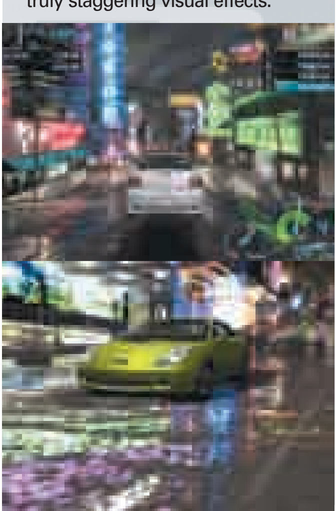
It may come as a shock for fans of Sixties super-spy Cate Archer to learn that the third instalment in the *No One Lives Forever* series will feature only a brief cameo by the sassy secret agent. In a change of direction for Monolith's tongue-in-cheek shooter, players will find themselves playing for evil crime syndicate H.A.R.M. and stepping into the shoes of no-nonsense hired assassin J.A.C.K. (Just Another Contract Killer). The story takes place during the interlude between the previous *NOLF* adventures and Monolith has warned us to expect a far less ladylike approach from the new trigger-happy anti-hero than we're used to from the more stealthy-minded Miss Archer…

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

WE FEEL THE NEED…

Format:	PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
Origin:	Canada
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	In-House
Release:	Q4 '03
Genre:	Racing
Players:	1-4

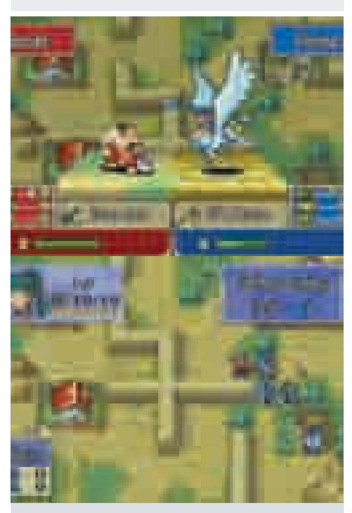
While the *Need For Speed* series has delivered a reasonably dependable line-up of racing titles over the years, the theme of its many incarnations has been far from consistent. When we were last behind the wheel of EA's chameleonic arcade racer it had us tearing around with the law in hot pursuit and – in yet another departure for the series – the latest offering invites players to enjoy the high-speed thrills of illegal street racing. Clearly taking inspiration from the likes of *Midnight Club* and the *Fast And The Furious* movies, *NFS Underground* looks to set itself apart from the crowd by spicing up the high-octane action with some truly staggering visual effects.



FIRE EMBLEM

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

Format:	Game Boy Advance
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	Intelligent Systems
Release:	Q1 '04
Genre:	RPG/Strategy
Players:	1-4



Liked *Advance Wars*? Then you'll no doubt be thrilled to hear that Nintendo's Intelligent Systems studio has been at it again, making another highly addictive dose of turn-based strategy for the GBA. A long-established and hugely popular series in Japan dating back to the days of the NES, *Fire Emblem* bears many gameplay similarities to the *Advance Wars* titles but with much more of an RPG slant. Trading the military hardware for dragons, wizards and Pegasus Knights, *Fire Emblem* also concentrates on the traditional RPG elements of character interaction and skill development. With all this depth and an engrossing story to boot, the GBA should have another big hit.

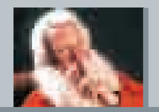
NARC

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Format:	PS2, Xbox, GameCube
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Midway
Developer:	In-House
Release:	Q2 '04
Genre:	Action
Players:	1-2

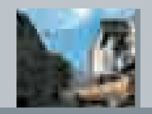
Don't get us started about the days when games were games and all round 'ere were fields, but news of Midway's plans to remake 1988's brutal arcade classic *NARC* had us harking back to the heyday of side-scrolling button-bashers as though it were yesterday. Admittedly, gameplay and technology have moved on a bit over the last 15 years and we're torn between feeling excitement and dread as to how the game will translate into the modern-day 3D arena. Details are sketchy at the moment, but we're told to expect the same merciless approach to law enforcement as we once again set out to clean up the streets and put a bloody end to Mr Big's drug cartel.





DELAYED – CHRISTMAS (MULTI)

■ With the big titles dropping like flies onto next year's release schedule, you really have to wonder just what you'll be unwrapping on 25 December. Christmas, it seems, is now scheduled for Q1 2004.



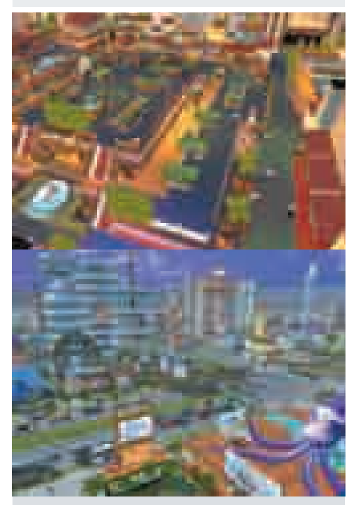
CANNED – DRIVER 3 (GAMECUBE)

■ Spearheading the big Atari bow-out, Reflections' forthcoming sequel will no longer find its way onto the GameCube, the console with least competition for this promising title. Go figure…

VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG

MONEY FOR NOTHING

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Developer: Deep Red
Release: Q4 '03
Genre: Management
Players: 1



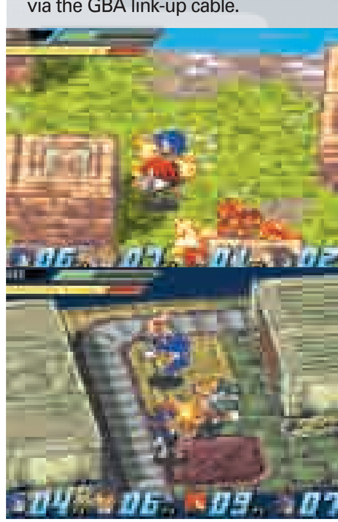
The world of virtual visitor attraction management has gone a little stale since *Rollercoaster Tycoon* started to feel dated, but that could be about to change if the latest offering from the creators of *Monopoly Tycoon* lives up to its promises. Placing you in charge of a small hotel at the wrong end of the Vegas Strip it's your job to bring in the big spenders, keep out the cheats and work your way up to the top of the casino business. It's all about keeping the chips flowing and the coins dropping 24 hours a day, which means keeping the diverse clientele entertained with rides, cabaret shows, OTT theming… anything to take their minds off the fortune they're losing.

SONIC BATTLE

SONIC CRACKS HIS KNUCKLES

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: In-House
Release: Q2 '04
Genre: Fighting
Players: 1-4

Ever found the question of who would win in a fight between Sonic and Tails keeping you awake at night? Us neither, but nevertheless SEGA is giving us the chance to find out by pitting the sprightly blue hedgehog against his loveable chums in a no-holds-barred battle to the finish. Evidently struggling to find work at the moment, you'll find eight of your favourite characters from the Sonic universe (including Knuckles, Shadow and, of course, Sonic himself) have turned to the underground world of bloodsports just to make ends meet, each bringing their unique fighting styles and special moves into the fray for the amusement of up to four players via the GBA link-up cable.



EVIL GENIUS

NO, WE EXPECT YOU TO DIE…

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Elixir
Release: Q2 '04
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1



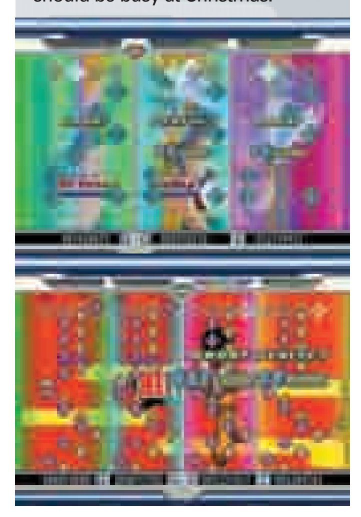
After spending the last five years toiling over its massively ambitious debut title, *Republic*, Elixir is leaving the murky world of Russian politics far behind with its latest project. *Evil Genius* looks set to deliver a much more light-hearted strategy game that puts players in the role of a Sixties super-villain bent on global domination. You'll be in charge of excavating your very own underground lair, devising heinous plots for holding the world to ransom and masterminding outlandish deaths for any meddling secret agents. As big fans of Bullfrog's *Dungeon Keeper*, the thought of an *Austin Powers* take on the minion-management theme is intriguing.

DANCING STAGE UNLEASHED

DOUBLE THE PLAYERS, DOUBLE THE FUN

Format: Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Release: Q4 '03
Genre: Party
Players: 1-4

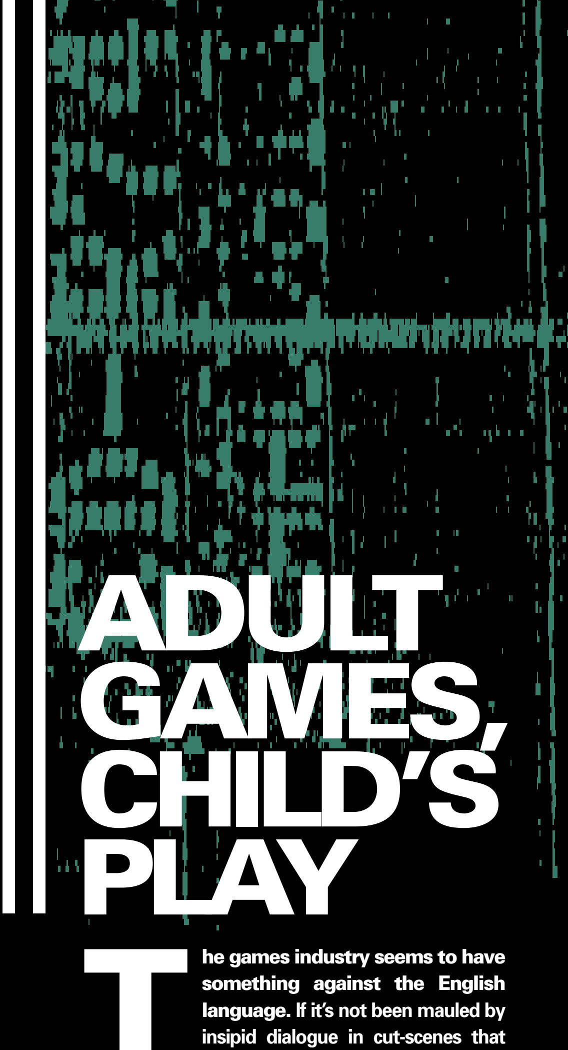
Moving ever further away from the coin-op machines, this latest evolution of the quick-stepping phenomenon has more than enough new features to interest even the most jaded dancers. Live support will let you download new songs and patterns, but the jewel in *Unleashed*'s crown will be the simultaneous four-player mode. Whether this will be purely competitive or if Doubles mode will be getting that much more complicated is still unknown, but we're sure we're not the only ones interested in the idea of a single-player 16-panel mode. Between this, *Dance:UK* and *Dancing Stage Fever* for the PS2, dance fanatics should be busy at Christmas.





“Come back here, I'll bite your legs off!” **Battle Chess Amiga [Interplay] 1988**





ADULT GAMES, CHILD'S PLAY

The games industry seems to have something against the English language. If it's not been mauled by insipid dialogue in cut-scenes that would make a sixth-form poet blush, it's being abused by tautologies like 'interactive game' and meaningless phrases like 'mass market' and 'release date'. However, no games-related misnomer could be greater than what's apparently a simple word – 'mature'. According to dictionaries and English teachers the world over, the word 'mature' means something that is fully developed; adult, sensible and wise. *Inspector Morse* is mature, cleaning your toilet on a regular basis and being nice to your parents is mature – it's really not a very rock 'n' roll word. Which makes it all the more curious that the only prerequisite for a title



WE'RE TOLD THAT GAMING IS GROWING UP, BUT IN THE RUSH TO PRODUCE 'MATURE' TITLES, IS IT ACTUALLY DUMBING DOWN? GAMES™ EXPLORES THIS WORRYING TREND AND FINDS A NASTY CASE OF CULTURE CLASH

being referred to as mature or 'adult' in the games industry is that it contains video-nasty levels of gore and preferably some harsh language to boot.

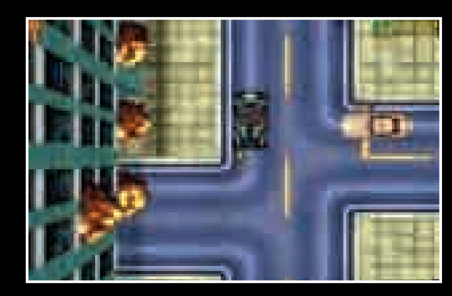
There aren't many other forms of media that would equate visualising the fevered mind of a psychotic 14-year-old with maturity, but this strange choice of words is, at the end of the day, just a question of semantics. What is of more concern is that the industry has found that gratuitous violence and language sell (curiously, sex still doesn't get much of a look in – perhaps the assumption is that 14-year-old boys already know how to simulate that). Not only do they sell, but adding a drop of claret and some unguarded language to your game doesn't require any special artistic skill on the part of a developer, unlike, say, complex and involving gameplay.

From many publishers' point of view this is a win-win situation: they get to make lots of easy-to-develop games with a built-in audience and obvious marketing hooks, and they also get to pretend to themselves and the world at large that videogames are 'growing up'. The only problem is that those developers whose bread and butter has traditionally been more abstract titles where the gameplay is the hook and the graphical stylings are aimed at younger gamers, or at least at a general audience, are starting to find their games harder to sell. As a result, it's now easier than ever to argue that games are being 'dumbed down' but, more seriously, it's widening the divide between the Japanese and Western gaming markets.

NO SEX PLEASE – WE'RE GAMERS

Although MPs and the tabloids seem to have given up complaining about violence in videogames, curiously the one element of gaming that keeps getting attacked is its portrayal of the dirty deed – despite the fact that virtually no games feature anything more titillating than a few oblique, *Carry On*-style references in cut-scenes. Just in the last few weeks the largest cinema chain in the US has banned all arcade games featuring 'sexual behaviour' from its lobbies, and the Australian Office of Film Literature and Classification has repeated its threat to ban any titles where "there are rewards for sexual violence, gross nudity and other sexual activity". What games are these people talking about? Have they been importing Japanese hentai titles or something?

ADULT GAMES, CHILD'S PLAY





"THE TREND HERE IS FOR TAKING A JAPANESE CONCEPT AND WESTERNISING IT BY MAKING IT MORE ADULT IN APPEARANCE YET WITH MORE SIMPLISTIC GAMEPLAY"

The 'general audience' who prefer flashy graphics over taxing gameplay increasingly consists of 20-something casual gamers, and the real concern here is whether gaming is being simplified in an attempt not so much to appeal to a wider audience as to placate this new, older, core demographic. It could be said that instead of appealing to a larger section of society publishers have just refocused on a slightly older, but equally narrow, group of people. The nub of the problem seems to be that not only does a 20-something audience want lots of violence and gore it also wants its games as simple as possible. Leisure time in general might be on the increase but there are fewer gamers out there who want to learn a completely new set of skills and controls for every game they play.

EASTERN PROMISE

"Most people want simple game mechanics," says Dave Jones, creator of the original *GTA* game, now managing and creative director at Scottish developers Real Time Worlds. "They want tremendous variety of content and depth in compound interactions. Simple game mechanics are appealing to the mass market and the casual player." In fact, Jones is of the opinion that it's not violence that's selling but simplicity. "Look at titles like *Wipeout* and *SSX*," he says. "They have no violence, yet appealed to the 18-30 demographic. These games just suited their play style and appealed to their senses."

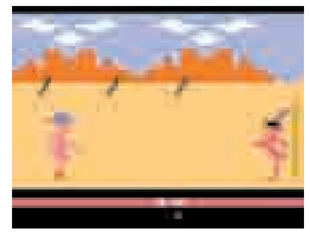
This is certainly true, but both of these games had a strong adult theme to their presentation and it seems that it is that match-up between non-cutesy presentation and simplistic gameplay that is the real sales winner. The problem is that this shift seems to have altered the public's tolerance for any game that can be perceived as childish or uncool. When a more hard-core gamer finds a less discerning games player decrying *The Legend Of Zelda* or *Ape Escape* because they're 'for kids' it's heartbreaking. It no longer seems to matter that these and similar titles have gameplay that is far more involved in terms of the control you have over your character, the variety of tasks they must perform and the ingenuity of the challenges they face. The real problem is that if fewer abstract or cute titles get made then the inspiration for the older-demographic titles is suddenly taken away. Could there have been *Mortal Kombat* without *Street Fighter*? Or *Wipeout* without *F-Zero*? Publishers and gamers alike better hope so.

Of course, the trend here is for taking a Japanese concept and Westernising it by making it more adult in appearance and yet more simplistic when it comes to gameplay. For pretty much the first time in the industry's history Japanese-developed titles are not dominating sales charts as much as they used to. Even though they've arguably not been at their creative best in the last couple of years, companies like SEGA and Nintendo have found that many of their games, even those with previously well-established brands like Mario and Sonic, have not been leaving the same mark on the charts as they once did. Other Japanese companies such as Capcom and Konami already seem to have realised that more overtly violent, less abstract titles are what the market really craves at the moment, with titles like *Metal Gear Solid* and *Resident Evil* selling much better than *Goemon* or *Mega Man*.

Of course, we have a somewhat unique perspective on the situation in the UK since our taste in consoles and software has always been the least receptive to Japanese titles. We've never really taken to PC games in quite the same way as the rest of the Western world either, certainly not in terms of the format's complex strategies and simulations – titles that, for better or worse, could really be described as mature. No, John Bull has

A MORE CIVILISED AGE

The first game to be labelled as mature, or in this case 'adult', was *Custer's Revenge* on the Atari 2600. This charming title cast you as a naked Custer – apart from his hat, boots and scarf – and required you to rape a series of equally exposed Indian squaws tied to poles. Having to dodge cacti and arrows was your only impedance in a title that makes *GTA* look like it was programmed by nuns. Published by the now happily deceased Mystique it seems incredible that this game could ever have been released. But it was, and although it was not a sales success and was largely unknown at the time of its release, it has subsequently been quoted many times as proof that all videogames are inherently evil.





always liked his games simple and violent, and now it seems the rest of the world is starting to agree.

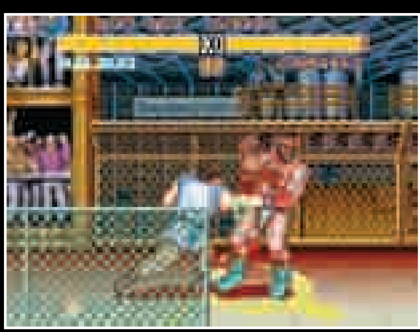
The Xbox, for example, has enjoyed a respectable degree of success without a single sizeable hit from a Japanese-developed title. This would have seemed unthinkable a few years ago and yet now Microsoft seems quite happy to pursue its plans for global domination without much apparent care for bringing on board Japanese developers or the Japanese games-buying public. As Stefan McGarry, public relations officer at Sega Europe, admits: "SEGA Europe is actively seeking to acquire new content for the European market, with European-developed titles like *Headhunter* and *Warhammer Online*. We aim to strike a healthy balance of strong European content to release alongside our traditional Japanese-developed titles."

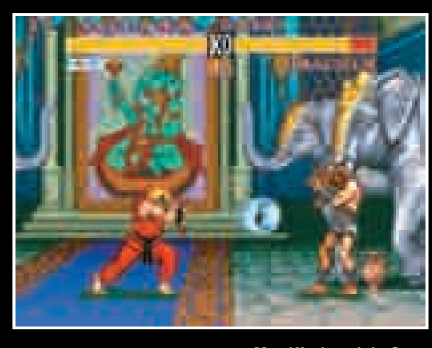
DEVELOPING PROBLEMS

The fact that the success of *GTA* and its imitators has coincided with the rise of the Xbox seems to have, however unintentionally, sidelined the Japanese development community in a manner it's never previously experienced. The tastes of Japanese gamers has not altered appreciably – the recent success of Capcom's *GTA3* is a very rare success for a game of this nature – but the likes of Konami and Tecmo, at least, seem willing to increase the number of Western-orientated titles they produce, it is these firms that are succeeding as a result. "We are talking about very different cultures and I do not see this changing for a long time, if ever," says Jones. "These mature games are intertwined with our culture."

The trend for Western gamers to shun Japanese complexity and cutesiness is spreading into other gaming genres too – it's not just obviously complex RPGs and platformers that seem to be getting the cold shoulder. Critically acclaimed titles such as *Rez*, *ICO* and *Otogi* have all failed in the UK even though they can't really be described as cutesy and despite the fact that they're not particularly complex. The problem seems to be that their gameplay's reliance on learning new skills and portraying an abstract game world has become an increasingly large stumbling block. Jones admits that it's always difficult to sell abstract gameplay to a mass audience: "It has to be presented in a very subtle way. You are enticing them to spend more time [on a game] than they had maybe planned. This is always going to be hard." McGarry agrees, "For such titles, word of mouth is key. Controversial content often benefits from a lot of hype whereas







Mortal Kombat took the *Street Fighter II* formula but replaced the gameplay with buckets of blood. Result? Instant sales.



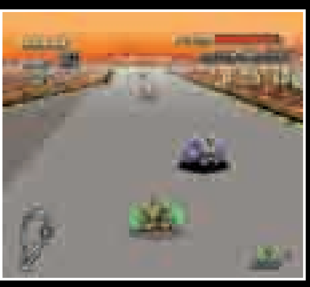




ADULT GAMES, CHILD'S PLAY









Innovative titles like *F-Zero* are copied by games like *Wipeout* that add a 'grown-up' style but make the gameplay easier.

"IT'S UP TO PUBLISHERS TO BREAK THIS CYCLE WHICH COULD MAKE GAMES MORE PUERILE THAN EVER"

quality titles, however abstract, should always win through eventually." As inappropriate as the term 'mature' might be, its opposite number, 'cutesy', is often more offensive to some gamers. In the strictest sense this most inelegant of terms is at least vaguely descriptive – there's no point pretending *Dark Chronicle* or *Ratchet & Clank* have anything but cute, cartoon-style graphics. But cutesy, when used by many a games player, is a derogatory term spat out in contempt of the concept of playing any game that seems to have been designed for children. And this is the overriding irony of the whole situation. Ignoring the fact that simplistic revenge fantasises being fought out in a guns-blazing bloodbath are about as far away from maturity as you could imagine, the real problem is that most of these violent games just aren't as complex and involving as their cutesy counterparts.

Even though it's success is largely justified by its wide range of locations and vehicles, nobody likes to admit that the combat in *GTA3* is fundamentally flawed or that the vast majority of the missions are repetitive and over-difficult. That's at least 50 per cent of the gameplay that just doesn't work, but it's the most popular game of the moment. And yet the man who created the original *GTA* game is quite open about the fact that the gameplay isn't too taxing. "*GTA* has a very simplistic game mechanic – it is *Pac-Man*," admits Jones. "The people are the dots you eat (run over) and the police the ghosts who chase you." And yet the public is willing to forgive the fact that the gameplay of this and lesser similar titles is no more than adequate at best because the game and its marketing is cool and uncomplicated. It's heartening to see that obviously bad games like *State Of Emergency* still can't sell on gratuitous imagery alone, but even that game managed to briefly get into the upper reaches of the charts.

It might seem obvious, but the real secret of sales success is to appeal to a middle-of-the-road audience. That explains why Kirby remains the most obscure Nintendo character and why tiresomely unpleasant titles like *Postal* are kept away from high positions in the charts. As Dave Jones points out: "The big sales will come from the mass market and these will be the culture-driven, content-rich, fun games. Like it or not, it's the Britney Spears, the Spice Girls, the Take Thats of the games world [that sell]." McGarry clearly has a greater belief in the taste of the games-





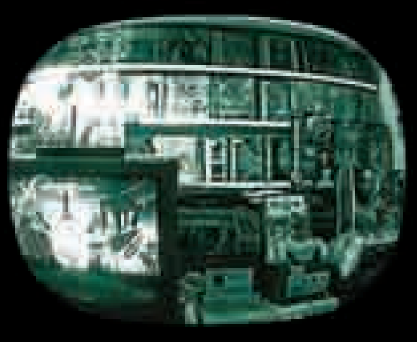












buying public though: "Good quality titles with gratuitous content will raise the bar for other developers. If they're rubbish, they simply won't sell. Gamers aren't stupid, they'll buy into a title if it plays well, not because there's a hint of nudity."

But if convincing someone to buy a game that doesn't have a direct relationship to actions in the real world, or that doesn't contain violence, is so hard, what's the likelihood that any game will ever earn the mantle of mature? Any student of literature, indeed anyone who's ever seen a film more complex than *Bulletproof Monk*, would laugh at the suggestion that games could ever play host to any serious philosophical or emotional content. Considering that most arguments that games already do would probably centre around something like *Final Fantasy*, with its sledgehammer subtlety and badly translated dialogue, it's not difficult to see their point. It's perhaps unsurprising that developers have been unwilling to make too many serious attempts in this area. As Jones points out: "This is going back into a niche market and one that is unproven. The demographics of this group may be at complete odds with those who want to play games."

TIME TO GROW UP?

It should be possible though – cut-scenes and storylines are becoming ever more important in all genres – but it seems like it would require just too much work. After all, there's a reason there aren't too many clones of *Zelda*, *ICO* or *Rez* around and it's not simply that those games don't sell any more, it's that they require hard graft – years of work from experienced programmers, artists and producers, not just a simple driving game with a few expletives scattered around it.

The fact is that's it hard enough to produce a quality game that plays to the medium's strengths, let alone tries to absorb additional content from elsewhere. It's wrong to hope or expect games to mature into something else – they're an art form that has slowly evolved over the last 30 years with its own conventions and requirements for success. The danger now is that these conventions are being simplified for short-term gain and the mass market, and it's now up to publishers to break this dangerous cycle that could, ironically, make games more puerile than ever.

Thanks to Video Game Centre, Bournemouth, for their help with this article. Give them a ring on 01202 527314 for games and consoles.

FATALITY

Perhaps the earliest and most obvious comparison to make, between a game with cartoon visuals and a clone with added violence and excised depth is *Street Fighter* versus *Mortal Kombat*. The latter was clearly an attempt to make a more violent, Westernised version of the former and the fact that it was so limited in moves and strategy compared to its inspiration didn't stop it from becoming one of the most popular games of the Nineties. Ironically, as sequels have made the gameplay ever more complex the fortunes of the series have floundered, such that this year's really-not-too-bad *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* wasn't nearly the hit that Midway had hoped.



THE LEGEND OF CELDA

Nintendo has never been one to chase blindly after market trends, but when it first unveiled the GameCube it ran an impressive reel of CGI that showed a very realistic Link and Ganondorf fighting in a foreboding-looking cathedral. It was therefore something of a surprise when *The Wind Waker* was revealed and it seemed that Nintendo had purposefully made the game look even more childish than previous games. Because of the GameCube's limited fortunes in the West it's difficult to judge just how much effect the graphic style had on putting people off buying the game, but certainly in Japan, where the console has fared much better, the game was not a major success.



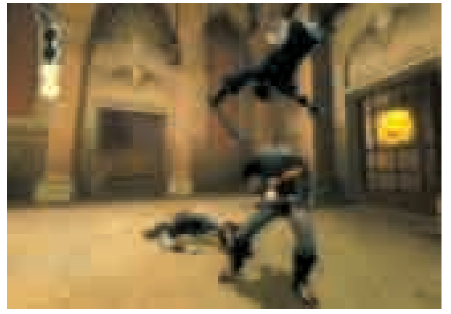




REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know, if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



The simple combat hides a lot of depth once you master the many moves, so you can dispatch the bad guys with a bit of panache.



Find this surreal hidden location and you'll be rewarded with a permanent health boost. Not a bad pay-off for so little work…





Outdoor sections are a rarity, but for a good reason – you really can have too much of a good thing and these beautiful areas impress more for their scarcity

games™

FINGERPRINT

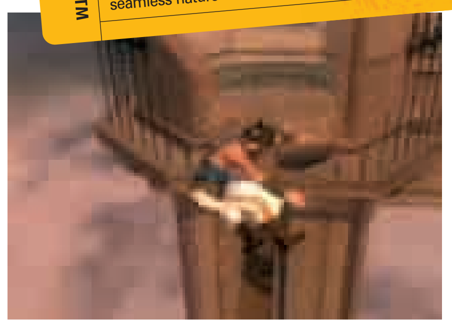
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TIME TEAM: Slow down or stop time to see off the swarms of enemies. Or just to look cool.

FLUID: Few games can boast the smoothness and seamless nature of *Sands Of Time*.



The Sword is your main weapon, leaving the Dagger to be used for specials and cleaning up after the deceased.



Narrow beams hundreds of feet in the air are far from safe at the best of times – looks like Princey has picked a fine time to lose his balance.



Much like in the wonderful *Ico*, it's the lighting that makes many of the locations that much more impressive. Mmm, shiny.



For a PlayStation2 title, the level of detail even on non-interactive environments is absolutely staggering.





THEY SAY TIME WAITS FOR NO MAN. THEY'RE CLEARLY WRONG…

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GC, PC, GBA

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
21 November

PLAYERS
1

There's nothing easier in the world of gaming than dredging up a famous name from the retro scene, giving it a 3D lick of paint and turning around a cynical update in a matter of months. Without wanting to name-check any particular monstrosities, we've seen enough of this sort of thing to set off alarms in our heads time and time again, so, naturally, big names like *Prince Of Persia* send said sirens into a cacophonous frenzy. This is especially true in this case, and even though several early play tests killed off much of our doubt, the horrible *Prince Of Persia 3D* (even slammed by series creator Jordan Mechner when we spoke to him at E3) is not something we can forget in a hurry (or at all, for that matter). Still, at least the on-form Ubisoft – complete with a swanky new logo for its latest batch of games – is a firm that seems to have learned from its mistakes.

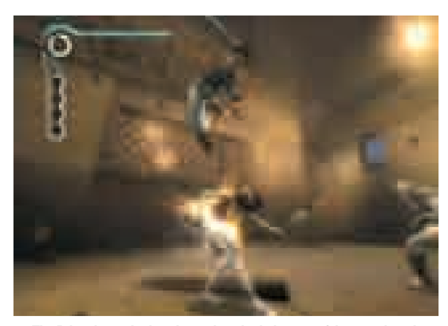
The main problem with the third game in the series was the fact that it simply threw some polygons at the formula of the original game and hoped they would stick. All too aware of this, *Sands Of Time* has been developed from the ground up as a unique title that, in truth, shares little more with the original game than the presence of the leaping protagonist. Indeed, *Sands Of Time* is very much a 21st Century product – sumptuous visuals, intuitive control and many unique ideas combine to make for one of the most technically accomplished pieces of software that has graced the PlayStation2 all year.

But what impresses even more than the Prince's vast arsenal of flashy and practical moves is the way in which they can be used in quick succession. It may not sound like much, but even a simple combination of wall-running and jumping manages to impress, if only due to the perfect animation that ties everything together. Between this wonderful movement and ease of control, the whole game manages to generate a flowing nature seldom seen in gaming, and as such looks and feels much more polished than almost any other adventure you may care to



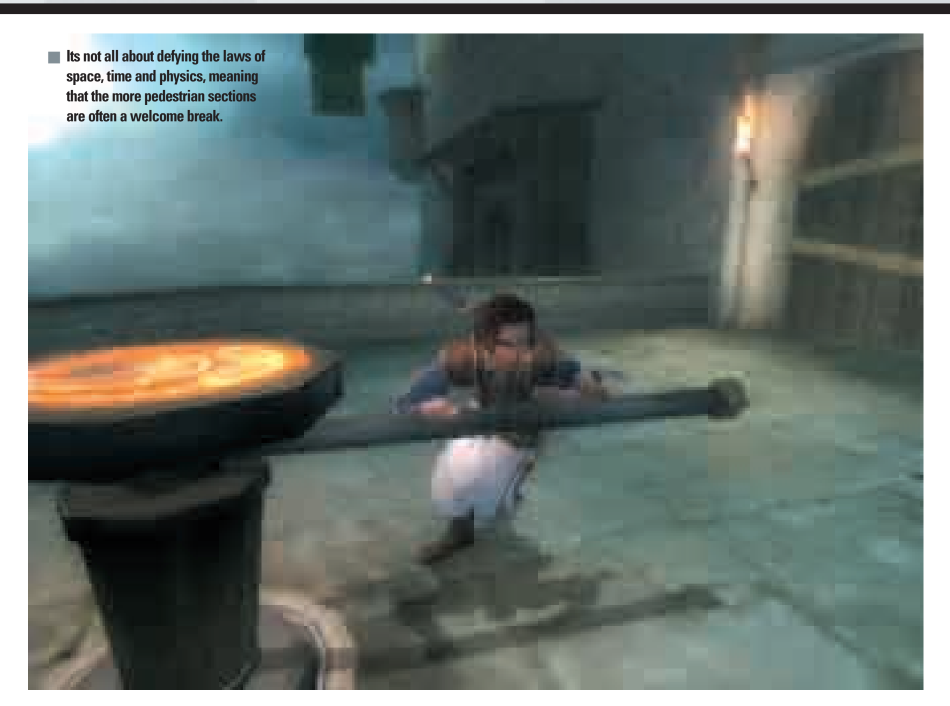
TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS
ICO



The Prince's acrobatics play a pivotal role in most of the game's action sequences. All in a day's work for the saviour of mankind, really.





Its not all about defying the laws of space, time and physics, meaning that the more pedestrian sections are often a welcome break.

24:00 TIMELINE HI-LIGHTS

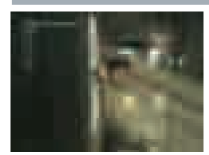
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO REACH THEM...

1 HOUR



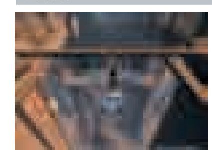
Still stunned by the sumptuous visuals, the slightly fiddly controls should by now be starting to etch themselves into your brain. You'll have explored a bit too.

1 DAY



Making progress. Despite too much bullet time in the first hour, you press on and discover that the later sections without the over-used slowdown effect are far more striking.

1 WEEK



It's over. By now you should have quite comfortably seen the Prince through to the finale, but the temptation to begin again should be growing by the minute...

SOUND AND VISION

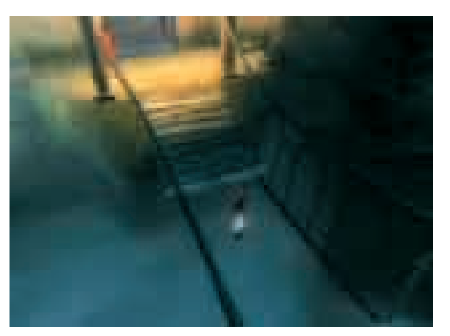
An interesting feature of *Prince Of Persia* is the series of visions the young hero receives at the save points scattered throughout the game. An excellent idea in theory, it's just a shame that for the first half of the action these visions of the future give away just too much about the wonderfully worked puzzles and tricky platform sections that follow. With no option to disable these, you're stuck with the spoilers whether you like it or not. Admittedly, these get less severe later in the game but we do feel that the in-game training is more than sufficient without a 30-second slideshow of what to do next.

"BETWEEN THE WONDERFUL MOVEMENT AND EASE OF CONTROL THE GAME MANAGES TO GENERATE A FLOWING NATURE SELDOM SEEN IN GAMING"

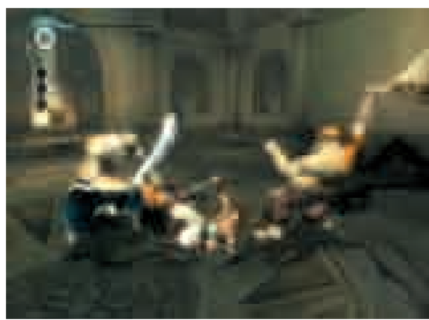
mention. And that's before we even begin salivating over the incredible sense of scale, wonderful lighting and well-thought-out puzzles.

Of course, this is due at least in part to the excellent Jade technology that powers both this and *Beyond Good & Evil* – an engine you can be sure we haven't seen the last of. Somehow managing to push polygons in a more convincing and impressive manner than many would have thought possible on the ageing Sony hardware, the engine doesn't stop at modelling. Stunning animation and effects add to the already beautiful package, culminating in a real visual feast which, save for a few glitches here and there, really raises the bar for its competitors. Just when you thought it couldn't get any better, the dramatic score kicks in at just the right moments to add to the sense of exhilaration and excitement. Admittedly, the number of pieces is limited and there's a great deal of repetition over the course of the many battles you face but the atmospheric music still serves its purpose and remains fresh throughout.

After a fairly brief section that walks you through the controls and moves, you stumble across one of the game's key features, the Dagger Of Time. Much like Mario's FLUDD water pack or Lara's questionable muscle growth rate, this is a unique feature intended to distance the game both from its competitors and its own past. As the above examples prove so well, this could have gone either way but it's with a great sense of relief that we can say it works like a charm. *Max Payne* has a lot to answer for – slow-motion sequences in games are now commonplace and, more often than not, pointless, but this is arguably the best use of controlled slowdown since the 2001 Rockstar shooter. The weapon isn't just used to provide breathing room, though – make a mistake and the



Let's get this straight – this guy can run up walls and freeze time but has great difficulty crossing a bridge. What a genius...



It's often the little touches that impress with *Sands Of Time*, like the ability to block opponents' attacks even while prone.



The new-look Prince is a fine figure of a man, and moves effortlessly around the vast palace.

Dagger can be used to rewind time to the moment before it happened. As this power is only available in limited supply (although still pretty generous), you'll really need to think carefully before using it.

You might assume that a game so heavily based around such a feature would have to cut corners in other areas and, usually, you'd be completely right. Thankfully Ubisoft, knowing this is one of its biggest hopes of 2003 after it wowed all who saw it at E3 and ECTS, has polished every area of the game equally, and short of a few bits of slightly questionable dialogue, there really is nothing that lets the package down from a technical standpoint. But that's not to say that this is the perfect game. Though its few detracting factors are minor at worst, they do have a fairly significant impact on the way the game plays.

Our first complaint concerns the visions the hero receives upon using a save point. Clearly included to give the player a rough sense of direction, the loose hints of the things to come soon grow into much more, and as puzzles and obstacles get more complicated, the visions in turn get longer and more revealing. This just makes much of the game a lot easier than it should be, giving away just a little more than we'd like and ruining some otherwise great surprises. Admittedly, you don't have to save at each of these but seeing as how several are essential in progressing the story and others represent waypoints between tricky sections, you'll naturally want to save often. Also slightly disappointing is the utter lack of extra features, meaning that playing the game through a second time rewards you with nothing more than a warm and fuzzy feeling. The length of the game is pretty much perfect for repeat plays but, alas, the unlockables and incentives simply aren't there. The game is still easily strong enough to go through again, but without a real reason to do so many a punter will pick the £20 trade-in credit over another adventure with the Prince.

Regardless, *Prince Of Persia* is easily one of the best games of its ilk on the PlayStation2 and, for that matter, any of the other current platforms. It's for this reason that *Sands Of Time*'s limited-period exclusivity will be a real kick in the teeth for Microsoft and Nintendo – to have a game of this calibre working for the opposition until the holiday rush has died down is no laughing matter for the two firms whose Christmas line-ups are far from spectacular. Despite harbouring a few flaws, most of which annoy rather than detract from gameplay, there can be little doubt that *Prince Of Persia* is a game easily worth its asking price, a game streets ahead of much of the PlayStation2 back catalogue and, most importantly, a deeply enjoyable title that is just begging for every gamer to complete it. Buy it, play it, love it – even though it's over a little too soon, *Sands Of Time* is the best proof so far that there's plenty of life in Sony's old dog yet.

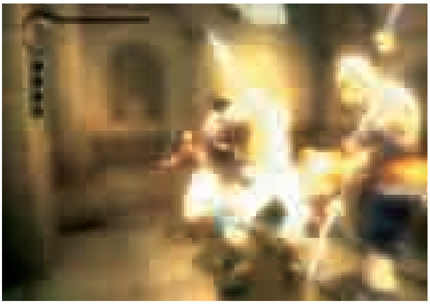


VERDICT 8/10

IMPRESSES IN ALMOST EVERY WAY – A TRIUMPH

FIGHTING FIT

While many developers are continually looking for the next evolution in videogame combat with analogue stick control or intricate combo systems, Ubisoft has taken it completely the opposite way – *Sands Of Time* features some of the most simplistic combat we've seen in a while but benefits massively for it. With most of the moves pulled off using a single button, the intuitive controls allow for some incredibly seamless battles. Additional directional control allows you to fend off multiple foes at once with a greater degree of accuracy and fluidity than you would perhaps expect, and before you know it you'll be leaping off walls, running up poles and vaulting enemies mid-combo.



Rewinding time has been made as beautiful as it is functional – undo your untimely death with some lovely motion blur and oversaturation.



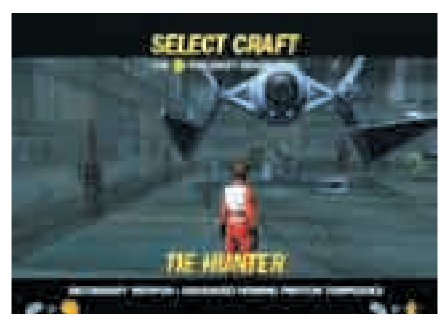
These hanging bars are usually just an athletic way of getting from A to B, but in this instance (and a few others) they double as puzzle switches.

FAQs

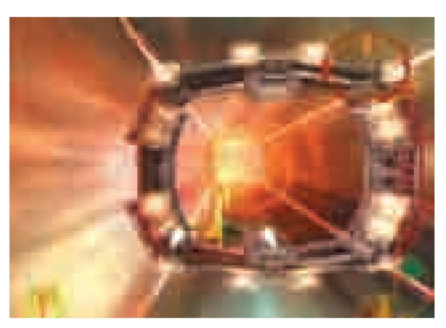
Q. HOW LONG?
Think over ten hours on your first play, although once you master the controls and moves you can breeze through the early stages.

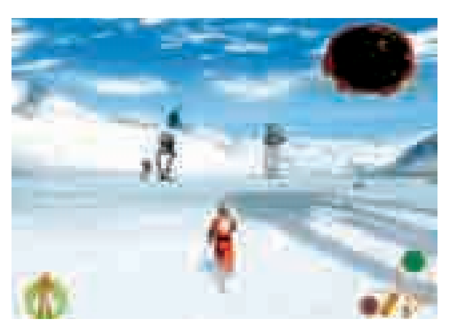
Q. REPLAY VALUE?
One of the game's weakest areas, unfortunately. A strong enough game to make you want to go through it again but there's no reward for doing so.

Q. IS TIME CONTROL JUST A GIMMICK?
Far from it. From allowing multiple chances at tricky sections to assisting the Prince in combat, the Dagger's powers prove invaluable.



You'll get to sample the finest ships in the Rebel and Imperial fleets.


The Naboo Starfighter makes a welcome return in *Rebel Strike*.


Taking on the perils of Hoth on foot? That can't be a good idea…



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
LucasArts

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

HAS THE GORGEOUS SHOOTER FINALLY TURNED TO THE DARK SIDE?

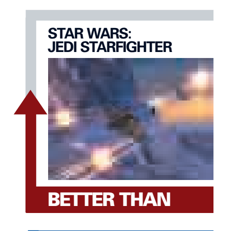
STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

After one too many *Jedi Power Battles* and *Masters Of Teräs Käsi*-type incidents, it looks as though the days of the awful *Star Wars* cash-in could be over. With the reputation of the films and licensed properties taking a blow with each substandard release, LucasArts can't afford many more mistakes. Luckily, we've had a good spell of Force-powered titles lately – the sublime *Knights Of The Old Republic* and impressive *Jedi Outcast* represent a bit of a renaissance. Now this latest update to the high-flying shooter series that began on the N64 returns to join the elite ranks, but we'd rather it had stayed to finish its training first…

The first woefully apparent flaw is that the on-foot sections haven't been tweaked since we first saw the game, and to call them poor would be something of an understatement. Sloppy control, terrible targeting and an absolutely atrocious camera all conspire to ensure these pedestrian sections are very little fun and their frequency is equally unnerving. The Speeder Bike sections are slightly better, although the twitchiest controls since *V-Rally 3* really aren't helpful. This contrasts with the rest of the vehicles, which manage to feel a lot more solid than the newcomers. Bizarrely, the on-foot levels sometimes switch to a fixed side-on view that makes for some 2.5D platforming action – memories of *Super Star Wars* come rushing back, but even these can't save the experience.

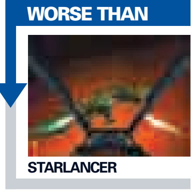
Fortunately, that's pretty much it as far as negativity goes – in terms of new content, at

STAR WARS: JEDI STARFIGHTER



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



STARLANCER


Asteroid belts – staple ingredient of the space shoot-'em-up for as long as we can remember.


Taking down a ship thousands of times the size of your own is a hell of a lot easier than you might think.



There's nothing finer than turning the Imperial army's own tools against it. Except maybe cakes.



Taking on the Death Star is even more fun with two rebels flying side by side – co-operative gaming at its best.

least. *Rebel Strike* still suffers from many of the problems that plagued *Rogue Leader* and adds a few more of its own for good measure. That said, it also greatly improves on its predecessor in other areas – visuals are absolutely stunning in places, the trade-off being that loading times can be quite lengthy, even badly disrupting the action in places. In a similar way, the cut-scenes intended to inform and direct often end up diluting the gameplay, cutting to actual movie footage at every possible opportunity simply because they can.

The single-player campaign makes up the crux of the action but while the missions are as varied as ever, its structure and progression are far less linear than in the game's dogfighting predecessor. This works both for and against the new narrative (still based around the original movie trilogy), meaning the frustration of finding yourself stuck on a particular mission is somewhat alleviated, although Medals do still need to be achieved in order to fully progress. As we've mentioned though, far too many of the missions cut to on-foot sections for some easy variety – a move that would probably be far more beneficial if these weren't the worst aspect of the game.

One other thing to bear in mind is that *Rebel Strike* is not for the easily frustrated. Some of the later missions are horribly difficult to even scrape through, let alone earn the coveted Gold Medal. Most of this is clearly intentional as the previous games have shared this insane learning curve, but there can be no escaping the fact that much of the difficulty this time around stems from poor camera and control in certain areas. Yet as frustrating as it gets, the compelling re-creation of the *Star Wars* universe will keep fans occupied for hours, even if much of that time is spent cursing at the screen or hurling the controller to the floor.

Ultimately, however, *Rebel Strike* is its own worst enemy. Overly ambitious from the word go, the wildly varying quality of the many sections and vehicles does nothing for the overall quality of the game – ironic, seeing as how this is one of the most visually polished titles of recent months. But to call this a glorified tech demo would be a little harsh – for all its shortcomings, nothing beats the sense of involvement and achievement in the epic battles and well-choreographed set pieces, especially for fans of the movies. Anyone who has played any of the previous *Rogue Squadron* games will know what to expect from most of this title, but while its predecessors have been unadventurously solid, *Rebel Strike* is quite the opposite. A valiant effort with some wonderful moments but it promises more than it can deliver.

VERDICT 6/10
TECHNICALLY IMPRESSIVE BUT HEAVILY FLAWED

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
DUEL OF THE FATES: Multiplayer is a welcome inclusion, especially with co-op play as good as it is.
MIDICHLORIANS: Some sections (like the Speeder Bike areas) really do require the reactions of a Jedi…

FAQs

Q. ROGUE LEADER, YOU SAY?
Yes indeed – the previous game is present almost in its entirety, albeit only in multiplayer form.

Q. UNLOCKABLES?
Hundreds of them. We'd compile a list but we're sure there are secrets that even the staff don't know about yet…

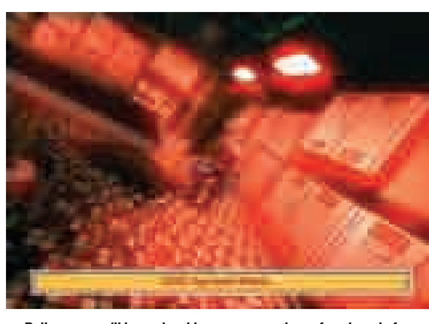
Q. BUT IS IT FUN?
As we've pointed out, *Rebel Strike* may be fraught with problems but it still manages to remain enjoyable most of the time.

RED FIVE STANDING BY

By a fair stretch, the finest weapon in *Rebel Strike*'s arsenal is the two-player Co-operative mode, allowing you to play through all of the missions from *Rogue Leader* with a human wingman. This really does make for some fantastic moments – have a friend in an X-Wing guard your fragile bomber, for instance, or plan complex manoeuvres and strategies between you. There's even a Versus mode if you'd rather battle it out with your buddies where you can pick from a decent range of ships and scenarios before raining down blaster doom, although this isn't anywhere near as compelling as working together.

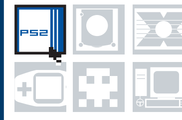



As the story progresses, you'll end up coming face to face with the people behind the conspiracy – even though they do have stupid names like 'The Mongoose'. Must have been hell for him as a child…


Believe us, you'll be seeing this screen more than a few times before the end of the game. Death is but a few rounds of gunfire away…



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
France

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Ubi Soft Paris

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
14 November

PLAYERS
1-2 (1-4 Online)

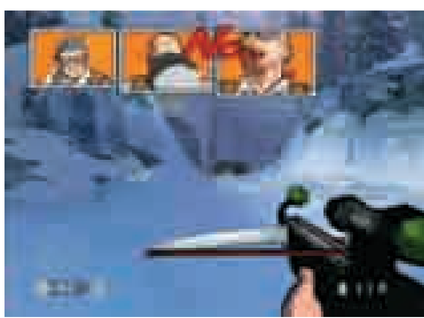
XIII

COME IN, NUMBER 13 – YOUR TIME'S UP

Ahh, cel-shading – is there anything it can't do? Considering that virtually every gaming genre has now been given the cartoon-style treatment, obviously not. You could argue that *Jet Set Radio* has a lot to answer for, but Ubisoft's rather bold move of creating an entirely cel-shaded first-person shooter is one that's paid off, at least from a visual standpoint. And in an industry where individuality is hard to come by these days, it's the graphics that count when trying to catch the eye of the gaming public – a fact not lost on Ubisoft.

And so we have *XIII* – a game that has promised all along to be more than just a novelty-packed FPS, offering solid gameplay and a storyline that'll have you perched on the edge of your seat. But hype often leads to disappointment, and where we were convinced six months ago that *XIII* would be one of the games of the year, we're slightly saddened that it's merely a decent enough title (for the most part). It's one of those mixed-bag situations – flashes of genius and genuinely enjoyable moments of success, occasionally mired by unbalanced weapon damage, clumsy AI and the odd bit of unfair level design that requires astounding feats of memory.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out that the Belgian comic book series of the same


Score an impressive headshot and you'll be treated to a comic-like montage of the villain's death, just to show how great you are.


Stealth is a big part of *XIII* so you'll often have to take out foes without causing a ruckus; that's where weapons like chairs come in handy.

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
Eight chapters encompassing 37 missions make the game pretty lengthy, but some of them can be completed relatively quickly once you know where you're going.

Q. TOO MUCH STORY?
It's an important element, but one that's not used exhaustively. Cut-scenes don't last too long, though not being able to skip them if you've seen them before is a bit tiring.

Q. IS IT DIFFICULT?
Not overly so once you learn where the enemies are going to be, but the frustration factor of dying over and over as you do so is something that's bound to grate on even the most patient gamer's nerves.



■ **If you have to stop playing for any length of time, the handy 'story so far' recap will fill you in on how close you are to uncovering the conspiracy and keep you updated on any new developments.**

name plays a big part in the way *XIII* looks, but there's also a distinct flavour of conspiracy-theorist TV show *24* about the whole thing. This isn't surprising, given that the story has more Machiavellian plotting behind it than the whole US government put together. With more twists and turns to it than the biggest of twisty-turny things, the plot behind *XIII* is easily one of the game's strongest assets, mainly because it'll keep you coming back for more when other games would have severely tested your patience.

But that isn't to say that *XIII* doesn't feature its fair share of frustrating moments – indeed, there are more than a few stages that'll have you swearing at the top of your voice as you die for the umpteenth time. It's in situations like this that your powers of memory will be pushed to the limit as you try to remember where every enemy is due to appear, usually with a high-powered grenade launcher. There are a few too many instances where you'll have to scout ahead and die in order to see where the enemies are in order to memorise them and make it through unscathed some time in the next ten attempts. While these sections may be pretty rare (perhaps one in every five or six stages), they're still more than enough to make you forget about the good bits you've enjoyed up to that point.

The game's determination to offer some kind of realism regarding its weaponry is also a bit of a sticking point, as it seems to be slightly inconsistent depending on what gun you're using. Using the ideology of 'headshots equal death' is all well and good, but only when it's applied across the board – if a blast to the back of the head at point-blank range with a basic pistol only results in the enemy turning around with his shotgun primed, that's where the problems begin. Combine that with some variable AI (some guards look right past you, others develop detect you at 20 yards) and unskippable cut-scenes that have to be sat through over and over if you keep dying, and you've got more of those 'joypad out the window' moments that we hate so much.

Are we being a bit hard on *XIII*? Maybe, but then having played through to the last battle of the game, we have to admit that our enjoyment has been tarnished by these seemingly small problems more than once. On the other hand, we did manage to get more than enough enjoyment out of it to see us through to the very end. From the comic-style flash boxes that highlight particularly satisfying kills, and the constant cliffhangers in the story, there's plenty here to offset the shortcomings enough to keep you playing. Here's hoping the rather obviously planned sequel will make up for where this one lets us down a bit.



VERDICT 6/10
GOOD IN PLACES, FRUSTRATING IN OTHERS

games™ **GLOBAL**
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
UNLUCKY FOR SOME: Thanks to its online option, *XIII* is the first 'proper' FPS for the PS2's new network abilities, as well as supporting PC and Xbox online play. But the Cube only gets split-screen play.

THE SPY WHO GLASSED ME

Despite the obvious FPS connotations, *XIII* relies on stealth for most of its gameplay. As such, you'll find that the concept of running around and shooting anything that moves is almost redundant for the majority of the game. Instead, various other methods to dispatch your enemies come into play. You'll often find unlikely weapons such as bottles, chairs, brooms and ashtrays lying around that you can pick up with the aim of cracking someone over the head with them. If close combat isn't your thing, you can also use throwing knives and even shards of broken glass as projectile weapons, taking down guards from a distance. However, you'll always have to remember to stash the bodies somewhere safe afterwards, to ensure that another guard doesn't find them and raise the alarm…

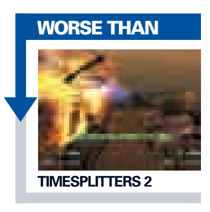


RED FACTION II



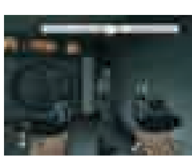
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TIMESPLITTERS 2

XBOX/PC £39.99/£29.99 OUT NOW



Although they play the same, the Xbox and PC versions of *XIII* benefit from sharper graphics and more multiplayer capabilities (up to eight people online). But that's no surprise.

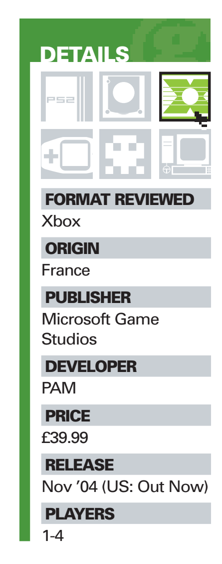
GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



Strangely, the GameCube version seems to based more on the PS2 build than the Xbox one – it doesn't look quite as crisp as we'd have liked, which is a bit of a shame.



Your player can wear jeans if you like, but it's rather poor form…



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
France

PUBLISHER
Microsoft Game Studios

DEVELOPER
PAM

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Nov '04 (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

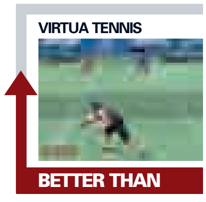
TOP SPIN

ANOTHER AVERAGE SPORTS SIM OR A TRUE TENNIS GREAT?

The great tennis game lineage reads something like this: *Pong, Super Tennis, Smash Tennis, Virtua Tennis*. A small yet highly distinguished group. But what gets a game included in this list? We'd say that it would be something that moves the genre forward – tennis is a simple game to bring to the videogame world but is immensely difficult to get right. *Top Spin* doesn't just get it right, it exceeds all expectations to deliver a polished and immensely playable sports sim.

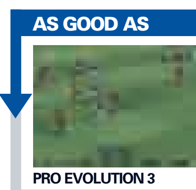
Top Spin's resounding success lies in its flawless control system. Simple, safe shots are assigned to the A-button, trickier and more specific shots are laid out on the remainder of the buttons. Even riskier shots (the real point winners) are on

VIRTUA TENNIS

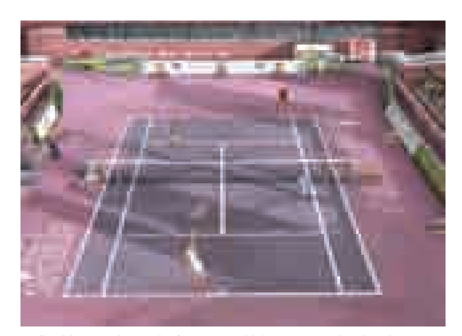


BETTER THAN

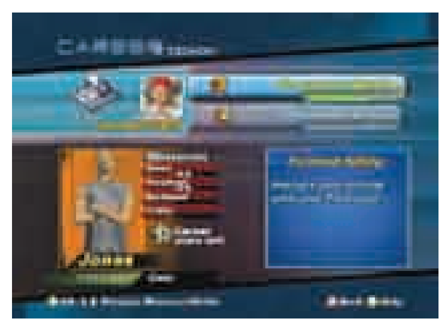
AS GOOD AS



PRO EVOLUTION 3



Doubles matches make for great multiplayer games, but there's no option for a mixed doubles tournament.



You'll have to choose which of your attributes you want to concentrate on, so your player will have to specialise.



These Career mode mini-games will help you build your strength in particular areas like serving or volleying. Useful, that.

FAQs

Q. ARE THERE REAL PLAYERS?
Yes. Aside from Anna Kournikova you get players such as Lleyton Hewitt, Gustavo Kuerten and Pete Sampras.

Q. SWERVE AND VOLLEY?
Top Spin has a number of different tennis shots – the ability of your player will determine how well you play them. Some players can even make the ball swerve in the air.

Q. SURFACE DETAIL?
While all the play is under bright sunshine (weather could have been made a factor) the different surfaces (grass, hard, clay and cement) make the ball react appropriately.



games™

GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

XSN: *Top Spin* will use Microsoft's new sports network to enable gamers to play in tournaments.
SEEDED: As with the majority of Microsoft's own titles, *Top Spin* will support downloadable content.

the triggers and bring up a moving gauge where you have to release the trigger while the pointer is in the sweet spot in order to play the shot successfully. It's this variety and simplicity that gives *Top Spin* a subtlety and variation that we've never seen in a tennis game. It also enables a novice to take on an experienced player, which makes the multiplayer game a delight. The 'In The Zone' feature (designed to reflect a player's form during a match) sounds like a gimmick but is actually a vital part of the gameplay. Regularly hitting winning shots will cause the ITZ meter to rise – the higher it goes, the more likely you are to get tricky shots in and even make your player reach the ball that bit quicker. It's a clever way of rewarding consistency.

But success means you have to think like a real tennis player. So if you're at the net, short, sharp presses will produce a successful volley while playing from the baseline requires long presses of the forehand or backhand buttons (and directions on the analogue stick) to get the angles required to win a point. In this way *Top Spin* mimics real tennis almost expertly. Naturally, the ball reacts differently on the various surfaces and will favour players with appropriate strengths. *Top Spin*'s accuracy even goes as far as offering two styles of play – men's tennis is all about power, pace and the serve; the women's game is all long rallies and placement and is a more ponderous affair that's ideal for newbies.

It almost goes without saying that *Top Spin* excels in its multiplayer modes but the single-player Career mode is just as engaging. You'll create your player and travel the world visiting tournaments, training schools and sponsors, and working your way up the rankings. Each continent has different schools, levels of opponent and sponsors and it's entirely up to you which you tackle first, but the premise of the game is to earn money which you can then spend on abilities and equipment, this in turn enables you to earn money and… you get the picture. It's great to see a tennis game that doesn't ignore the single-player experience or just resort to tournament-style play.

On top of all this, *Top Spin*'s animation is exquisite. Not only is the motion capture supremely rendered but the animation is seamless – the players even skid to reach the ball on clay. But none of this is at the expense of reaction time – it's quite possible to hit the shot at the very last moment and the animation will compensate and still hit the ball in a convincing 'last second' kind of way. In fact, the only thing we can find that's flawed in *Top Spin* is the lack of mixed doubles. It's a dumbfounding omission but one we can live with. Just.

So the great tennis game lineage now has a new addition. *Top Spin* fulfills every criteria for joining these classics as it advances the genre in one massive leap. It's subtle and complex without losing the pick-up-and-play appeal that all tennis games need. It is, in short, the best tennis game ever made. *Top Spin* is the tennis world's *Pro Evo*, and as a sports game we can't really give it much higher praise than that.



JOINS THE TENNIS GREATS WITH APLOMB – ACE

There are a range of surfaces to play on, each making the ball (and the players) react differently. But at least it will always be sunny…



STARS IN YOUR EYES

The training in the one-player Career mode comprises a series of mini-games, each designed to improve your player's attributes in one of four specialist areas: serving, volleying, forehand and backhand. If the training game is completed successfully then a star is added to the appropriate attribute. But with only 12 stars available and a total of 16 potential 'spaces' you're forced to decide where your character will specialise.





Gravity, it would appear, is an archaic concept in the *SSX* world. Not that we're complaining.



Where the course splits, you get to decide whether to go for the events or keep cruising.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
EA Sports Big

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

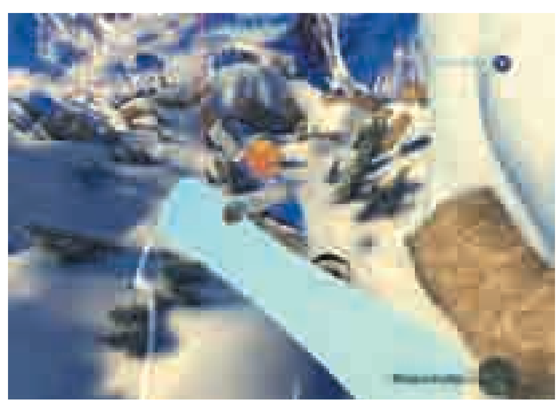
SSX 3

EA MAKES BOARDING TRICKIER THAN EVER

While Tony Hawk has the monopoly on decent skateboarding games, and *Aggressive Inline* rules the roller roost, there isn't been a snowboarding title in this generation whose name has become synonymous with the genre. Sure, there have been plenty of enjoyable re-creations of the winter sport – *Transworld Snowboarding*, *Amped* and *SSX Tricky* have all impressed to varying extents, but none has opened the genre up to much more than just the extreme sports crowd. Still, another year brings another chance for EA to force-feed snowboarding to the masses, and while the general public may not be ready to open its arms to boarding, there are plenty of worse places to start than this…

Those who persevered with the enjoyable *SSX Tricky* will recall the last course, Untracked, allowed a free run down a large mountainside. That level of freedom and natural danger has been lifted straight into this third *SSX* title, where it becomes the structural centrepiece for all the game's extreme proceedings – the action focuses on multiple runs and events on three peaks, each more dangerous than the last. You're given fair run of the mountain (there are still a few too many 'Out Of Bounds' messages to declare full freedom), and can choose whether or not to participate in the many events and challenges you'll encounter on your way to the bottom. This is clearly one of the key new features that EA is keen to push and, as such, it does work very well. It's quite possible to find yourself at the bottom of the run after missing every event, such is the playability even with little or no direction.

The new trick system is something of a double-edged feature. On the one hand, the massive combo potential does make for some high-scoring runs, and the reduced multiplier (calculating a bonus on only a part of the overall trick score)



The *SSX* crew now boasts the token annoying little brat, who takes it upon himself to spout Culkin-esque nonsense every five seconds. Great.



Half-pipes are the best place to show off the larger-than-life physics in the game, as this almighty leap so well proves…

FAQs

Q. CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS?
Strangely not, although you can piece together your own from the tunes provided for a price. Only in an EA game…

Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
There are three peaks, each of which is split into ten or so designated courses or can be ridden as one long free run.

Q. CRAZY TRICKS?
Crazier than ever. Between the refined Uber system and the link moves, you never have to stop scoring.



games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

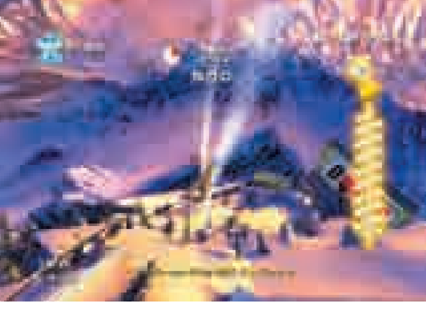
FREEDOM: Multiple routes and branching levels make for a great amount of course variety.

LINKAGE: With new tricks and a superior combo system, there's potential for some huge scores.

This trick might look impressive, but you don't get to see the almighty bridge collision that ensues. The pain…



Allegra thanks her lucky stars that she doesn't suffer from vertigo…



The later peaks include some horribly steep downhill sections.

seems harsh at first but you soon realise why EA has implemented such a feature – without it, infinite scoring would be a very real possibility. But herein lies a crucial fault – with it being so easy to maintain balance or just switch tricks, the scoring goals can be easily passed with a single lengthy trick. Thankfully, there are enough other tasks and challenges to stop this from being too much of a disaster and you'll probably spend much more time racing or simply cruising the mountain than you will gunning for high scores anyway. Still, as enjoyable as it may be, there are a few niggling flaws that refuse to go away. Typical…

One of the key areas in which *SSX 3* shoots itself in the foot a little is in its insistence that everything must be 'super cool'. While less eye-melting than *Tricky*, the larger-than-life tricks and stunt lines are more than sufficient without the zany characters and 'hilarious' one-liners. Also frustrating is the repetition of events. While cruising through a collapsing cave or a forest in a thunderstorm can be impressive, these happen in exactly the same way every time, something that is fairly apparent from the numerous runs required of you. That's not to say they don't impress, but there are plenty of examples where course design gives thrills that the spectacular one-off events could only hope for – 'wall of death' sections, leaping through the clouds and *F-Zero*-style 360-degree tunnels make for some of the more exhilarating sections.

Given the constraints of the sport, *SSX 3* does a great job of keeping the game as open as possible. Transport can be hailed at any time to take you straight to a number of points on the mountain, going some way to alleviate the one-shot nature of many of the big trick opportunities. If nothing else, the *SSX* series represents something of a benchmark for snowboarding games, a trend that continues with this instalment. No one title of this generation can claim obvious superiority, leaving a lot to individual opinion. EA's latest is technically well up there with the best of them and certainly keeps the bar suitably raised for forthcoming hopefuls such as *1080°: Avalanche*.



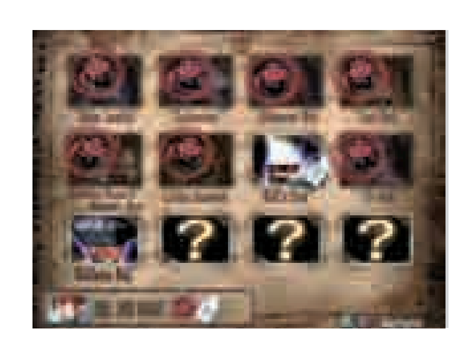
BUILD ME UP BUTTERCUP

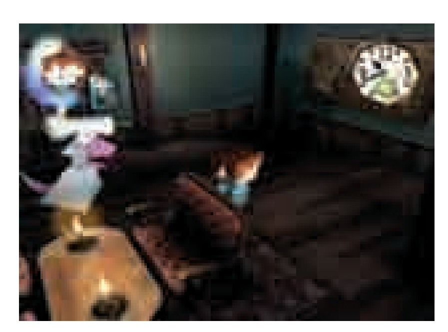
In a rather puzzling move, all of the characters in *SSX 3* begin the game with equally dismal stats, meaning your choice will come down to whose trick book you prefer (or simply who you like the look of). Naturally, these minimal abilities can be built up in Conquer The Mountain mode – big tricks and tournament victories all add to your wallet but there's more than just stat points on which to spend your loot. Outfits, boards and even soundtrack tunes will all set you back varying amounts of cash, but since there's a financial incentive for performing tricks between objectives (albeit a very small one), you can never become completely broke during your time on the slopes.




eMag







GREGORY HORROR SHOW: SOUL COLLECTOR

WHO SAID THE JAPANESE ALWAYS MAKE WEIRD GAMES?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
21 November

PLAYERS
1

As important as first impressions are, we're continually amazed by the number of people who ignore great games solely because of the visuals. *The Wind Waker* is the best recent example of this, but titles like *Toejam & Earl III* and *Pokémon* have suffered similarly at the hands of the blinkered gamer. Yet this doesn't seem to have deterred Capcom from creating one of the most distinctive-looking titles of this generation.

From the word go, it's clear this is no ordinary game. The cubic characters are a sign of the quirkiness that awaits, and while they are incredibly simple, visual quality is wonderfully sharp and smooth. The basic premise is to steal the souls of the patrons of Gregory House (a hotel of sorts) via surreptitious rather than violent means. Every inhabitant has their own strict daily routine, meaning that if you want to get the drop on someone you need to know where they'll be and when. An ingenious concept, much of the game is effectively detective work and planning how to nab those souls – a fairly linear but rewarding task. Of course, the more souls you retrieve, the more angry residents you'll have to avoid during the day.

To the untrained eye, *Gregory Horror Show* might just look like '*Resident Weeble*', but with no combat and an emphasis on information retrieval it's a unique idea. It may not be the longest game in the world, but if you're hankering after an original experience then this delivers in spades. The slow pace and repetitive nature of your tasks work wonderfully in the context of the game but it's easy to see how these could grate with a less patient player. *Gregory* won't light up the sales charts, but it's still a lot better than most of the stuff that does.



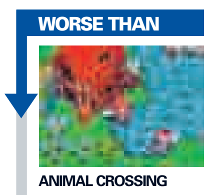
VERDICT 7/10
CAPCOM CONTINUES TO INNOVATE WITH APLOMB

NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ANIMAL CROSSING



The soul-retrieving tasks are pretty varied – the *Mario Party*-style board game is ample proof of this.



Collecting a soul is one thing, but the deal isn't done until the Grim Reaper gets his hands on it.

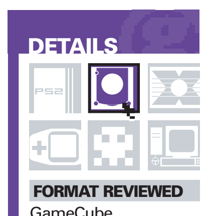




SEGA MAKES A TASTY GAME OMELETTE, BUT BREAKS TOO MANY EGGS

BILLY HATCHER AND THE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
Sonic Team

PRICE
£39.99

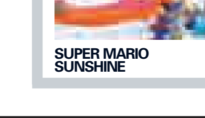
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

SONIC ADVENTURE DX

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

Oh, to be a fly on the whiter-than-white walls of SEGA Japan's creative room, with its floor-level seating and almost zen-like atmosphere. Imagine the things we'd learn – the complexities of Japanese game design, the secrets of SEGA's past success… and the contents of the cigarette that Yuji Naka must have passed round when he and his cohorts dreamt up the concept for Sonic Team's first original platform character since the days of the Saturn. (Note to Naka-san – whatever it is, we'll have ¥5000 worth, please).

You see, Billy Hatcher is a boy with issues – mostly to do with the fact that he's dressed up in a giant chicken suit, like someone you'd expect to see handing out flyers outside your local fried chicken emporium. Nevertheless, the weight of the world (or, more specifically, Morning Land) rests squarely on his shoulders as he sets out to rescue his friends from the evil crows and, well, you can probably work out the rest. It's your classic 'save the world from evil' story that all 3D platform/adventure games like to tell but, thanks to a bit of ingenuity on Sonic Team's part, with one unique addition – Eggs.

As you might expect, having to use Eggs to do pretty much anything in the game is what helps *Billy Hatcher* become something more than just a generic 3D platformer. It's not just some crazy gimmick either; like Mario's FLUDD device in *Mario Sunshine*, the Eggs play a key role in solving almost all the game's problematic situations. From the obvious squashing of enemies and pressing of switches to the slightly more thought-provoking puzzles that require the hatching of specific animals with elemental powers, you'll rarely be without an Egg – even getting around the level usually requires one, as they substantially enhance Billy's running and jumping abilities. If you like your platform games less speed-based and more taxing on the brain than *Sonic*, then *Billy Hatcher*'s the perfect substitute – it's challenging without being overly difficult and has more than enough charm for young and old players alike.



Ranking is based on a number of scoring factors, although you'll have to make it through a level without dying to take advantage of them.



Much of the time, the pattern of the Egg tells you exactly what you'll find inside if you take the time to nurture and hatch it.

FAQs

Q. IN A NUTSHELL?
It's *Sonic Adventure* again, but at a slightly more sedate pace thanks to the fact that you have to push an Egg with you wherever you go. Simple platform fun with a twist – it's Sonic Team's forte, apparently.

Q. WHY EGGS?
Why not? The fact is, Billy's pretty much a sitting duck (or rather, chicken) without one, so you should always try and keep one under his control at all times if you want to succeed.

Q. REPLAY FACTOR?
There's plenty to do on each stage – finding gold Chick Tokens, hatching Eggs and earning grades – so you'll no doubt have to come back more than once to get everything.

RANK AND FILE

Taking cues from previous Sonic Team games like *NiGHTs: Into Dreams* and the *Sonic Adventure* series, *Billy Hatcher* gains a little bit of replay value by awarding ranks at the end of every stage according to your performance. Which rank you earn – from D up to the very special S – depends on various elements being taken into consideration, most of which are rather obvious (such as time taken, Eggs hatched and enemies killed). However, the key to getting the top rankings is to notch up combos when taking on enemies – by ricocheting them into each other by using careful aim and wiping out groups of crows in a single attack, you can gain valuable combo points that add to your rank.

games™ CONNECTED

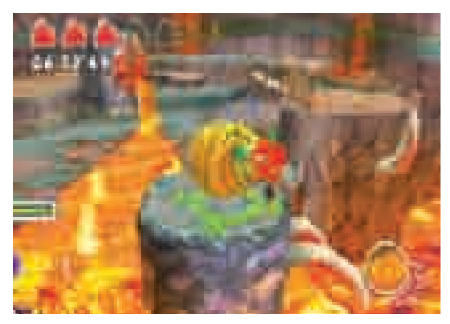
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

WHAT A JOY: If you can find and hatch the five specially decorated Eggs, you'll get the chance to download GBA versions of games like *Puyo Pop*, *Chu Chu Rocket!* and *NiGHTs: Into Dreams*.

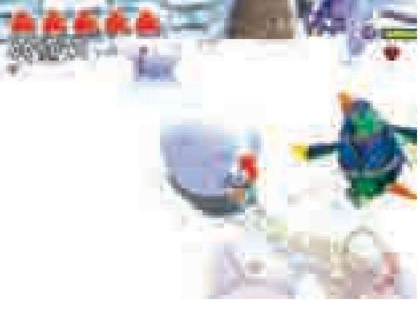


Finding the eight captured chickens isn't so tough at first, but the later levels get rather complex and can hide them away more.

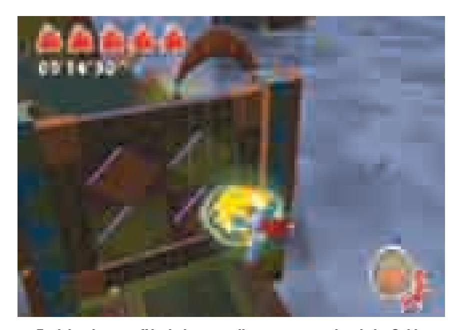
GIANT EGG



Extra characters such as Bantam and Rolly become available once you manage to rescue them from the clutches of the evil crows.



Rare moments of brilliance, like this mission that sees you building a giant snowman from the leftover snow, flash through on occasion.



Each level starts off in darkness until you manage to hatch the Golden Egg and get the Elder inside to call back the morning sun.

However, while Sonic Team has obviously gone to some lengths to try to make *Billy Hatcher* play differently to *Sonic*, the fact that the game still suffers from many of the problems that plagued even the original *Sonic Adventure* on the Dreamcast shows the developer still hasn't mastered the basics of 3D gaming. For instance, how many Sonic Team game reviews have you seen where the camera is criticised? Plenty, we'd wager, and *Billy Hatcher* isn't any different. Although you can move the camera freely much of the time, the game's desire to shift the view to one that makes things extra difficult for you often overrides your efforts, resulting in more than a few unnecessary deaths. The worst thing is, later levels feature certain sections that actually use the awkward camera as a distinct puzzle element, which to our minds is just rather lazy game design.

While the camera is certainly the most obvious fault with *Billy Hatcher*, sadly it's not the only one – a number of other technical hitches caused more than enough frustration to have us hurling abuse at our controllers. Slowdown, for instance, is something that you'd have thought would be easy to eradicate, but with *Billy Hatcher* it's virtually a prerequisite for almost every encounter with enemies (particularly on the levels where the background effects are more intricate). The collision detection also feels rather patchy in places, not so much in terms of killing monsters, but in the way the Eggs and Billy interact with the scenery. Being dragged into an abyss by an Egg as it rolls over a cliff edge, bouncing onto a ledge only to have Billy slip back down and leave his Egg stranded, or watching Eggs pass straight through rollable rails are just some of the annoyances that we've witnessed – all accompanied by our pained cries of distress.

And it's these rather simple and yet incredibly frustrating problems that makes our next thought such a bitter pill to swallow: *Billy Hatcher*'s just not as good as we wanted it to be. Much as we tried to believe that Sonic Team's golden touch had returned, the frustration that reared its ugly head on more than a few occasions proved to be too much to bear – a situation made worse by the fact that there's clearly a game of some quality inside, trying frantically to get out. If only some of the more technical issues had been addressed, we'd have been inclined to push the score up. As it is though, we can only think of what could have been and hope for more from the possibilities of a sequel.

VERDICT 6/10
SIMPLE FUN, WITH VERY ANNOYING FLAWS



The series may still lack the official licence for club and player names, but who cares when the gameplay is as good as this?

HAS SLICED BREAD FINALLY MET ITS MATCH?

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3



FORMAT
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8



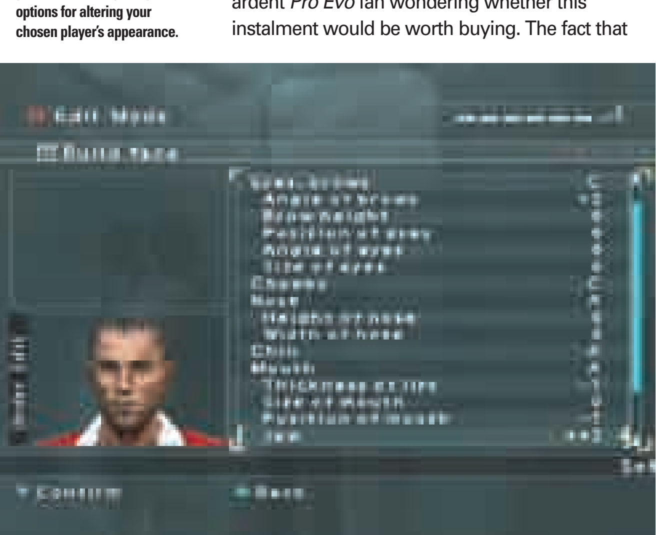


With every incarnation the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series edges further clear of its rivals by providing the most convincing and compelling simulation of the beautiful game the world has ever seen. The time we've spent on *Pro Evo 2* and its Japanese *Winning Eleven* cousins has eclipsed just about every other title this year, yet the endlessly entertaining action still seems to improve with every heated encounter. Needless to say, *Pro Evo 3* has already received plenty of attention as we scoured every inch of this Konami masterpiece to see if there's reason not to snap it up instantly.

Any sequel faces the challenge of justifying its existence as a step forward from its predecessor, and the question of how much Konami could improve on last year's showcase of gameplay excellence may have even the most ardent *Pro Evo* fan wondering whether this instalment would be worth buying. The fact that the gameplay in *PES3* is quite simply head and shoulders above that of any other football title – including its most recent forerunner – is good enough for us and, in terms of entertainment value for money, any footy fan is guaranteed an immensely profitable deal. And those of you who think you're content with *Pro Evo 2* need to know that the playing experience in *PES3* builds on anything we've seen before.

It's difficult to do justice to the largely non-quantifiable tweaks and enhancements that create an even more realistic flow in play, but in the absence of any revolutionary new features this is the game's major selling point. While a range of improvements have been made, pure gameplay has always been the cornerstone of the series' success and this is where



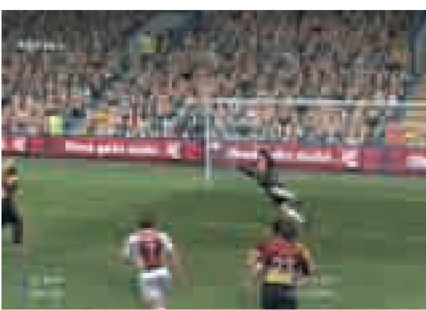


The Build Face feature offers you a bewildering array of options for altering your chosen player's appearance.





You can perfect your free kicks and other moves in a range of training sub-games.



RINGING THE CHANGES

When you find a spare moment to pull yourself away from the intense match action, chances are your first port of call will be the Player Edit mode. There are only so many times you can play as 'Trad Bricks' and watch prolific striker 'Von Mistelroum' hit the target before the minor chore of renaming becomes a must. Editing options have undergone a complete overhaul in *PES3*, with a particularly detailed tool for altering player appearance. The Build Face feature allows you to sculpt every facial contour to your requirements, while around 200 hairstyles ensure your virtual David Beckham's thatch can be kept up to speed with his real-life counterpart. More usefully, you'll be able to play as the most accurate replication of your pub team yet…



When it gets tense around the goal you can rely on your players to act instinctively and reach for the ball.

most of the refinement is found. While little of this may be apparent to the untrained eye, seasoned pros will revel at how much more fluid and accurate players' movement and touch have become. Konami says over 80 per cent of the in-game animations have been reworked to achieve such unparalleled realism, and only by playing earlier games in the *Pro Evo* series after sampling the delights of *PES3* does the degree of improvement become obvious.

Authentic ball control and physics are other key elements that have set the series apart from those titles that affix the ball to players within some magical field of control, and *PES3* doesn't disappoint in bringing the thrilling unpredictability of the sport to life more effectively than ever before. Those frantic goalmouth scrambles other games just can't seem to recreate become even more lifelike as your players intelligently stretch for the loose ball, and the overall level of realism in the gameplay dynamics really does leave every football sim we've encountered feeling incredibly videogame-like in comparison.

Aside from enrichments to the already legendary match action, every other aspect of the game has been beefed up to reflect this feeling of advancement. Seemingly trivial touches – such as definable refereeing strictness and the ability to pit club and country teams against each other – make a considerable difference, while the once 'tacked-on' Training and Master League modes continue to evolve into essential features. Single-player favourite the Master League is given far more managerial depth thanks to impressive additions like the player search engine, and the fleshed-out training challenges make for incredibly addictive yet constructive sub-games.

Predictably, the game falls a couple of steps short of perfection due to the lack of official club and player licensing, and the substandard commentary. While these elements appear to have actually worsened slightly since the last game, such niggles can be easily resolved and overlooked respectively. In the end it's the unequalled gameplay that shines through – the same enduring factor that puts the *Pro Evo* series at the pinnacle of its genre as its rivals continue to rely on those crowd-pleasing evils of licensing and pretty pictures. A real example to the industry.



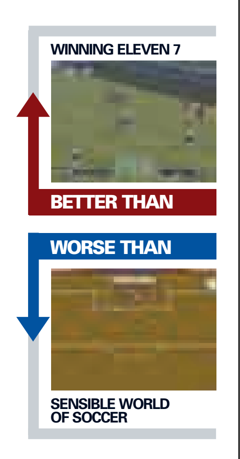
VERDICT 9/10
IN A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

FAQs

Q. VISIBLY BETTER?
Despite the lack of a licence, player likenesses are noticeably improved and their distinctive playing styles are clear to see.

Q. THE BUTCHER RETURNS?
Terry's insightful comments are again sorely missed, but Trevor Brooking hams it up just as well in his analysis.

Q. ADVANTAGE REF?
Referees can now play the advantage rule, but this can be as discretionary and temperamental as in real life.



CANNON FODDER 2

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

SYNDICATE

COMMANDOS 3:

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Spain

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Pyro Studios

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-12

MINIMUM SPEC
700MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 2GB HDD space, 32MB 3D graphics card

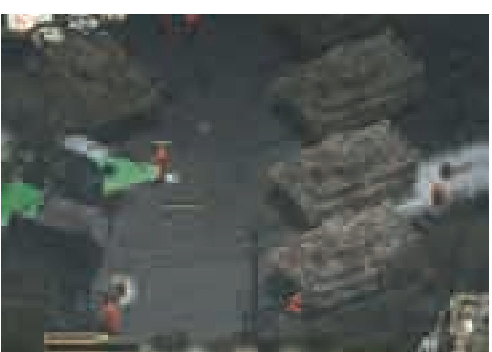
Anyone who invested enough patience in *Commandos 2: Men Of Courage* to break through the frustration barrier will testify to the immense rewards that lay beyond, yet even us Green Beret types must admit to being intimidated by the series' stupefying difficulty. Incredibly, Pyro's third serving of sadistically challenging covert strategy ups the difficulty level again and contains some of the most testing moments you're likely to find in a game.

For those yet to sample the delights of the *Commandos* series, players are furnished with a small squad of covert operatives and must complete a variety of objectives deep behind enemy lines. Each member of your team is capable of performing specific tasks – such as the Sniper's marksmanship or the Spy's mastery of disguise – which usually require shrewd co-ordination to overcome the obstacles in your path. Since your commandos don't have any superhuman advantage over the enemy where bullet damage is concerned, openly engaging more than a few adversaries outside a carefully planned ambush will generally bring proceedings to an abrupt end. The only way your outnumbered squad can hope to succeed is through meticulous stealth and your own strategic cunning.

As veterans of previous *Commandos* games we foolishly assumed our experience with the initially daunting interface and expertise in tactical deployment would give us the upper hand. How



Stealth is more important than firepower, and facing more than a few foes at once can be lethal.



This game really isn't once for the faint-hearted, with even early levels being very tough.

HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

Perhaps the most obvious addition *Commandos 3* brings to the series is the inclusion of multiplayer capabilities for both versus and co-operative play. With voice support enabling precise co-ordination of your team's tactical approach, Co-op mode lets you take on any of the game's single-player missions with your online buddies for back-up. Your effectiveness in combat situations is greatly enhanced since all characters can manually attack a target simultaneously, and strategic manoeuvres can be synchronised effortlessly. Deathmatch and Capture The Flag scenarios are available for versus play, allowing players to battle it out with either a standard team of commandos or a hand-picked platoon of regular troops. Eight classes of soldier from machine gunners to medics are available to either accompany your commandos or make up a standalone battalion.



PYRO TAKES US BACK BEHIND ENEMY LINES FOR ANOTHER GOOD HIDING

DESTINATION BERLIN

wrong we were. After a brief Sniper disposal errand, the first big assignment in the Stalingrad campaign asks you to defend an Allied General from a swarm of advancing German paratroopers. With avoidance of combat contrary to the mission objective, this Butch Cassidy-esque scenario throws newcomers in at the deep end with no time to devise a strategic approach before being overrun by a Nazi platoon. It's at this early stage that most players will develop a dependency on the quick-save key if they're to stand any chance of progressing.

Once again the level design is effectively watertight, blocking any obvious path through the missions with wily enemy positioning, and the razor-sharp AI makes your adversaries a real handful to outwit. Yet despite the urge to throw in the towel as every move is ruthlessly punished, the endless number of possible approaches to each situation means there's always another avenue to explore. Inspiring perseverance at the worst of times, you'll never find yourself reaching a complete dead end thanks to the myriad alternative opportunities presented by the environments and your characters' assortment of skills.

All missions have incredible replay potential as a result of this freedom, and certain epic scenarios can be played out completely differently with every attempt. A later operation in the Stalingrad campaign offers players a similar choice of assassination methods as those featured in the memorable Kirov Park mission from *Hitman 2* – find a sniper rifle and pick the target off from a distance, prepare an ambush with explosives, or obtain a disguise to get within spitting distance of your victim – but the *Commandos* version takes this basic non-linearity to a whole new level by making it possible to reach each of these solutions via a near infinite number of routes.

Sadly, despite such impressive scope, the difficulty level takes its toll on the playing experience. Although the surgical precision demanded of you is key to the sense of achievement that accompanies each success, the largely trial-and-error-based gameplay makes progress painfully slow. The isometric outdoor camera remains fixed on 90-degree rotations, and while a fully 3D indoor engine makes interiors much easier to navigate, both sections can still leave you disorientated or blind at inopportune moments. The otherwise immaculate visuals, however, provide some respite from these difficulties. But that's the kind of trade-off you must make with *Commandos 3* – endure the frustration and you'll be rewarded with something special. While we wouldn't go as far as to echo the Royal Marines' slogan of "99 per cent need not apply", only those with buckets of patience and strategic acumen will ever fully realise this game's awesome potential.



VERDICT 7/10
INSANE DIFFICULTY BLIGHTS A REAL GEM



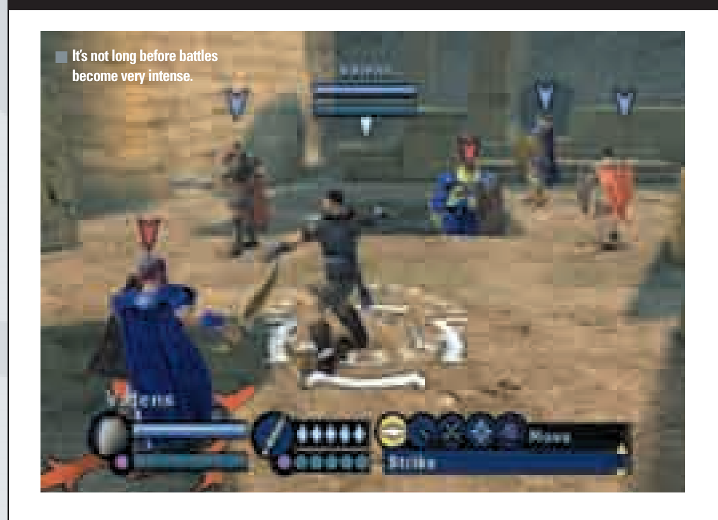
gamesTM
ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
TAKE YOUR PICK: Three campaigns are available from the off, lessening the chances of getting stuck.
OUT OF THE COLD: A new 3D engine and superb attention to detail make interiors more interesting.

FAQs

Q. ANY EASIER?
Get down and give us 50! On your knuckles. On a pile of broken glass. We'll have no mention of the 'e' word around here, soldier…

Q. LEARNT TO DRIVE?
This time around any of your squad can commandeer vehicles when needed, and they've all learnt how to use a grenade too.

Q. OUT WITH THE OLD?
Light-hearted characters Whisky the dog and Natasha have been scrapped to concentrate on the core group of operatives.


It's not long before battles become very intense.


The bars on either side of the screen show the crowd's interest. Keep them full to receive bonuses.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

QUICK MARCH: Each player's turn is split in two, meaning that the action is always flowing.

SHARE THE PAIN: *Gladius* lets up to four people play co-operatively against the computer.



A TURN-BASED RPG WITH GLADIATORS? RELEASE THE LIONS…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
LucasArts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-4

We're not afraid to admit that we were a little sceptical about *Gladius* when LucasArts revealed that it was a turn-based RPG featuring the sort of characters we'd last seen in the disappointing *Circus Maximus*. A visit to LucasArts' booth at E3, however, was enough to convince us that this sword and sandals epic actually had a lot of potential.

Thrust into the capable form of either Ursula (a Barbarian princess) or Valens (son of a famous gladiator) you must recruit a team of fighters in order to make your way through a series of testing trials, hopefully bringing glory to your school and regaining your family's honour. *Gladius*' expansive world map is filled with an enormous array of towns and cities, all hosting their own leagues and tournaments, and all must be completed should you wish to become the best trainer. Upon entering each league, you'll find that you're normally under-equipped to take on the various challenges. Fortunately, each town has a selection of fighters (human and non-human) that can be hired, thus ensuring more options become available as you delve deeper into the game.

Options definitely seems to be the key word in *Gladius*; there are around 400 different weapons, a variety of events in which to compete and a staggering array of races and classes to use, ranging from athletic Amazons to fearsome Minotaurs. Gameplay throughout is surprisingly fluid and doesn't feel as rigidly structured as traditional turn-based RPGs. *Gladius*' combat bar is also a departure from the norm and actually works surprisingly well – using a swing bar not dissimilar to any golf game it's a simple case of timing your strikes to create as much damage as possible. Once your characters have progressed in power, it's possible to buy impressive combos that can decimate an opponent in one turn.

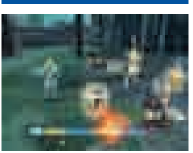
Sadly, *Gladius* isn't perfect – while it breathes some fresh ideas into a tired genre, it's pulled down by a sometimes disjointed storyline and a bizarre oversight which won't allow you to level up past a certain point until you've fought in certain championships. Add to this some uninspiring visuals and it's surprising that LucasArts simply didn't return to its lucrative *Star Wars* licence. Fortunately, *Gladius* rises above its initial shortcomings and delivers a lengthy and enjoyable experience.

Gladius' swing bar is one of the most important aspects of the game – use it wisely.



VERDICT 7/10
A BRAVE GAME THAT DESERVES RECOGNITION

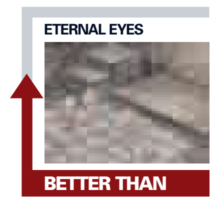
PS2 £39.99


Gladius on the PS2 has ropier visuals than the Xbox version but the pad is perfectly suited to the game mechanics, with the PS2 controls feeling more responsive than their peers.

GAMECUBE £39.99


GameCube *Gladius* is pretty much identical to the Xbox title. There are slightly fewer polygons and it lacks the 5.1 digital sounds of the black box. Otherwise, a good buy.

ETERNAL EYES



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

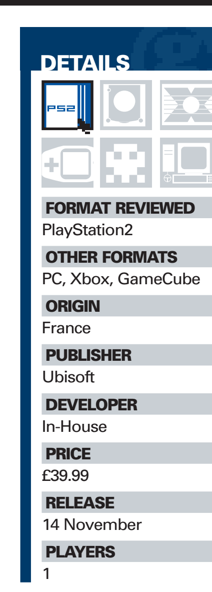


FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE


eMag



Pearls are the big prizes on Hillys. Collect as many of them as possible so you can buy parts for your vehicles.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
PC, Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
France

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

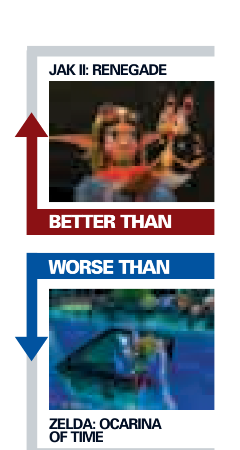
DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
14 November

PLAYERS
1

BEYOND





These explosive pods can clear the way in the caverns, but you'll have to find a way to make them pop up before you can use them…



The Dom'z attack Hillys on a regular basis, so you'll often have to fend off one of these monsters in order to continue.

games™

GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

CODE JUNKIES: Every time you save the game, you'll get an Internet code that can be used at one of the game's many websites, though Ubisoft is keeping quiet about what you'll get for using it.

FAQs

Q. FRIENDS FOR LIFE?
You'll always have someone partnering you through the game – either Pey'j or Double H – to help you out. But there are instances where you'll have to split up and regroup a little further through the level.

Q. PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE?
Being a reporter, Jade's approach is much more stealth-based than you might expect. Most of the time, you should only fight as self-defence.

Q. SIDE-QUESTS?
Plenty. The reward is usually a Pearl, but you'll be undertaking a very wide variety of tasks to get hold of them.

GOOD & EVIL

FOUR YEARS IN DEVELOPMENT? WELL WORTH IT, WE SAY

Multi-tasking – it's the future, at least in the world of videogames. Gone are the days when you can buy a driving game, for example, safe in the knowledge that you're getting pure racing action; now it has to be driving with RPG elements, with platform sections as you travel to and from the garage. Not that we're complaining, of course – if such additions enhance the base genre it can only be a good thing for gamers. Okay, so perhaps the success rate of such games isn't exactly outstanding (much as we hate to mention it again, but *Haven*, anyone?), but when a developer does get the balance right, it makes all the difference.

And that's where *Beyond Good & Evil* comes in like some kind of gaming cavalry to save us from all the 'could do better' genre-defying titles. Having teased us constantly throughout its four-year development with promises of a world without boundaries and the ability to go wherever you choose at any time, it's good to see that the final product actually delivers on much of its original remit; something that a lot of other anticipated titles haven't done recently. Subtlety is undoubtedly the key to success and, thankfully, it's one of *BG&E*'s strongest points. Rather than force you from one style of gameplay to another depending on which level you're on, *BG&E* blends the transitions together almost seamlessly and stops you having to readjust every time a new idea comes along. The difference is that you have the choice of when to change how the game plays, simply because the additional styles never really encroach on the main crux of the adventure; they're always peripheral and therefore serve to enrich the experience, rather than dilute it.

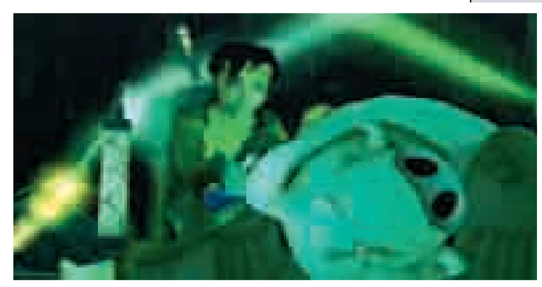
This may, of course, have something to do with the fact that *BG&E* doesn't follow the path set by recent games of the same ilk. Despite appearing to have all the prerequisites of a basic platform adventure game, *BG&E* has more in common with something like the last few *Zelda* titles. For starters, *BG&E* has an intense and absorbing plot that has you actually caring about the characters as the various twists and turns of the story have you eager to keep playing and find out what's going to happen next. The attention to detail in the different environments is also suitably high, with every area giving off its own vibe, from the populated city or tranquil respite of Jade's home to the polluted slaughterhouse region and *Alien*-esque Dom'z moon base. Consider all this with the more obvious technical comparisons (such as the context-sensitive Action button, a combat system that lets you focus on a single enemy, and having lead character Jade jump over gaps automatically) and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see where *BG&E*'s influences lie. Again, we're not complaining – in fact, that *BG&E* isn't just a generic platformer with extra bits makes us like it all the more.

Of course, that isn't to say that *BG&E* is perfect; while its problems might seem trifling against the good points, they're still there. What's more, in some cases the problems are more noticeable than others. For example, the fluctuating frame rate (which goes from smooth to juddering and back again on a regular basis) doesn't go so far as to hamper the gameplay, but still proves more than a little annoying when you consider how polished the rest of the game is. *BG&E* also commits the cardinal sin of having lengthy unskippable cut-scenes, a flaw that also blights Ubisoft's *XIII*. While we can appreciate that storytelling is an important part of the game, giving the player the option to move on if they've seen these scenes before wouldn't have hurt.

Like we said, though, the flaws in *BG&E* are more annoying niggles than outright problems and don't actually get in the way of what is a decent and engrossing adventure game. Indeed, we reckon many people will be surprised by how different *BG&E* is… although seeing as it's been in development for absolutely ages, we really weren't expecting anything less.

VERDICT 8/10

COMPELLING, VARIED, ENJOYABLE – A TOP COMBINATION

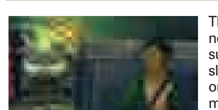




PICTURE PERFECT

One of the many sub-games that can be undertaken at virtually any point in Jade's adventure is the cataloguing of Hillys' inhabitants. Using your handy camera to snap every species of creature on the planet and then sending the pictures to the local Science Centre rewards you with credits, which can then be spent on valuable items like repair kits for your vehicles and precious food for recovering health. If you can manage to fill up an entire roll of film with creature photos you'll be given an extra reward such as a zoom lens for your camera, a Pearl or, if you snap all 56 animals, a disc with all your photos stored on it for prosperity.

PC **£29.99** **OUT NOW**



The PC version looks notably sharper and suffers slightly less slowdown when run on a high-end machine. Hopefully, this is an indication of what the Xbox version will be like.



The camera often pans around to give you a wider view when the action heats up.


eMag

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THIS GAME STAYS THE SAME

RATCHET & CLANK 2: LOCKED AND LOADED

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Insomnia Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
14 November

PLAYERS
1

Sequels, eh? Try as they might to do something new, sometimes there's no getting away from being just like the first game – particularly if it worked the first time around. So having seen the idea of 'core gameplay plus extra bits' incorporated into the original *Ratchet & Clank*, and with more games these days trying to break free from the shackles of what defines a particular genre and offer something more than you'd expect, it's not surprising that the sequel sticks to a similar formula. Although we doubt anyone could have predicted just how similar it would be.

Don't get us wrong – generally, *Ratchet & Clank 2* adds to what is already a proven concept so it's a bit more than just a rehash of ideas. However, it is only just a bit. In terms of improvement, it's clear that Insomnia has focused on packing in as much content as possible, rather than making what was there before any better. The key word here is definitely 'more'; more weapons, more gadgets, more planets and plenty more instances where the platform-based exploration takes a back seat in favour of what can only be described as mini-games that try desperately to integrate themselves into the rest of the game, rather than just being bolted on for the hell of it.

There's also an emphasis on exploiting these new features. Weapons, for example, upgrade themselves after repeated use – combined with tougher enemies and a health bar that increases according to how many of them you kill, using your arsenal is now more important. Replaying mini-games is also vital, as they're now the only way to stock up on Bolts for buying better weapons later on. Sadly, it's here that the main problem lies. Much as having to constantly revisit areas just to collect extra Bolts wasn't exactly fun in the last game, it's the same here. Given that the main game engine doesn't appear to have been improved either (particularly in the graphical sense), you'll suffer a little déjà vu if you've played the first game to death. Is that a bad thing? Perhaps not – but it's hardly enough to make it stand out from the superior competition either.





RATCHET & CLANK



AS GOOD AS

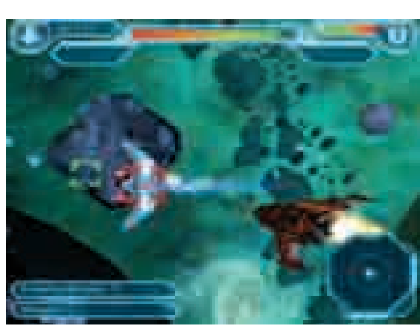
WORSE THAN



JAK II: RENEGADE



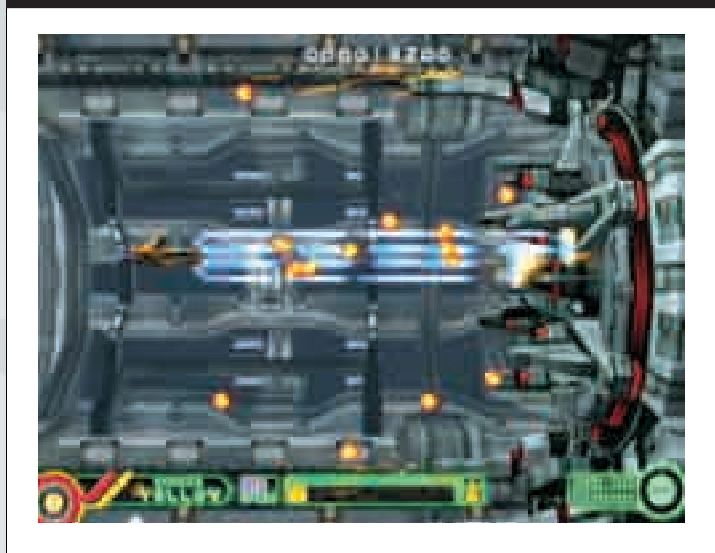
Despite having linear routes that limit where you can explore, the worlds in *Ratchet & Clank 2* still have an incredibly expansive look to them. However, though the game may seem bigger, there is an air of 'quantity over quality' here.



Breaks in the platform action come in many forms, such as stages that see you blasting spaceships out of the sky in your fighter.



The first few levels see Ratchet working alone with only his shiny OmniWrench for company – Clank doesn't appear until later on.





BORDER DOWN

IF YOU'RE BAD AT GAMES, YOU WON'T LIKE THIS…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

OTHER FORMATS
Dreamcast

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
G.Revolution

PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Now there's something you don't see every day – a game that gets harder the more you die, almost as if you're being scolded for your mistakes. Hardly seems fair, does it? And yet despite sounding like one of the strangest ideas ever put into a videogame, it somehow works really well in the case of *Border Down*. In fact, since we're used to scrolling shoot-'em-ups being insanely hard (particularly in the arcade), it hardly even seems out of place at all.

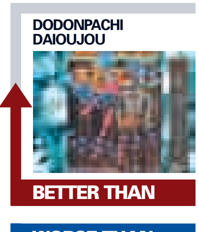
The whole concept revolves around the 'border down' idea of the title. After starting the game and seeing the layout of the first stage, you get to choose from three different 'borders' – Green, Yellow and Red – that are ranked from Beginner through to Maniac respectively. Which one you pick will benefit and handicap you accordingly; Green gives you three chances at success but only has low scoring opportunities, while Red will reward you with a high score if you can get through on a single ship. Of course, going for the easy option comes with a price; dying means you 'border down' and move to the next difficulty, making staying alive a priority.

With each border offering a different take on the level (such as alternate enemy patterns and routes to the boss), trying to explore them all is a major part of the game. Thanks to this twist on the genre, some fairly attractive levels, and plenty of enemies to dispatch, *Border Down* just about holds its own – especially since side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups are quite a rarity in most arcades these days. But against more extensive examples of the genre such as *R-Type Final*, it's definitely lacking. The music is rather light for a game of this intensity and you don't get the sense of satisfaction that comes with wiping out an entire fleet of Bydo ships. Most notably, *Border Down* is over quite quickly, with only six short levels to keep you going – but then this is an arcade game and that's the nature of the beast. Besides, unless you've got a bucket of change, you probably won't survive long enough to see the end anyway…


The Break Laser destroys big enemies but reduces the power of your regular attacks.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
DOWN YOU GO: The worse you do, the harder the game gets. Sounds like a bad idea? Hey, it works…
BACK ATCHA: Your Break Laser will repel boss attacks and turn them into a screen-destroying blast.

DODONPACHI DAIOUJOU



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



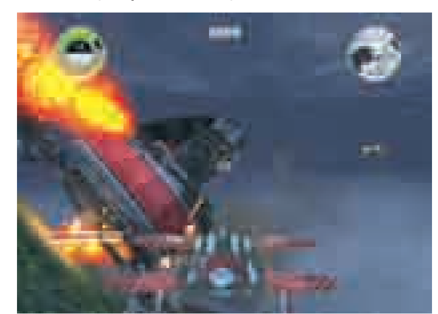
R-TYPE FINAL



VERDICT 6/10
UNIQUE, IF A LITTLE BIT SHORT



Players are able to land their aircraft at any time to man each level's devastating complement of turret guns.



Along with the swarms of enemy fighters you'll engage, a series of challenging boss battles stand between Nathan and true vengeance.



The scenery can be breathtaking at times, and offers plenty of opportunity for showcasing your repertoire of aerial trickery.

games™ GLOBAL

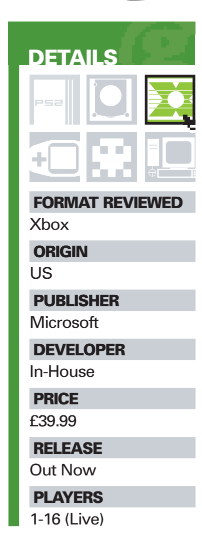
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

LOTS OF BOGEYS: Up to 16 players can take to the skies in the all-action multiplayer skirmishes.

MAVERICK: Six modes of online play let you take to the skies alone or with a team of wingmen.

MICROSOFT TAKES US RIDING THROUGH THE DANGER ZONE

CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16 (Live)

It's more than three years since the original *Crimson Skies* lit up the big blue for PC gamers, its sugar-coated arcade action providing a welcome dose of light relief from the scourge of dauntingly intricate flight sims on the market. Now the refreshingly light-hearted aerial adventures of Nathan Zachary and his motley band of outlaws has finally landed on Xbox, with alluring Live capabilities to boot.

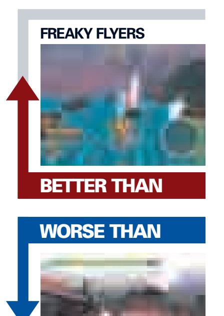
Once again the bogey-battling action is set against an alternative version of Thirties America, where the likes of Hollywood and Texas have become independent nations and the skies are ruled by fantastical aircraft. Scraping together a living through piracy as leader of the infamous Fortune Hunters, audacious fighter pilot Zachary is forced to leave his squabbles with rival pirates behind and embark on a quest to avenge the murder of a friend. The diverse selection of environments you'll encounter offer some breathtaking scenery, with the crispness of textures and delightful water effects particularly eye-catching. There's plenty of scope for free roaming each area both during and between missions, and there are typically a range of turrets dotted around the scene that players can man at any time for a break from the intensity of the dogfights. Armoured zeppelins, boats and defence towers offer an assortment of additional firepower to the weapons at your plane's disposal.

Controlling the warplanes is incredibly undemanding, allowing players to enjoy an exhilarating ride around the skies from the outset and enabling even the most daring stunts to be executed with ease. Combat is equally inviting, with precision targeting and superb manoeuvrability culminating in thrilling encounters with your swarming enemies. Yet while the accessible arcade action delivers thrill-a-minute multiplayer dogfights, over time the game's inherent lack of substance becomes increasingly evident. In fact, if you're unable to join in the gripping online fracas and recreate those classic *Top Gun* moments through your headset, the riveting gameplay dynamics and pleasing visuals may struggle to hold your attention for long.



VERDICT 6/10

SUPERB FUN, BUT INESCAPABLY SHALLOW



FREAKY FLYERS
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN
PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
14 November

PLAYERS
1-2

IS IT DANCING, OR JUST WAVING YOUR ARMS FOR THE CAMERA?

EYETOY: GROOVE



games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MORE SONGS: *EyeToy: Play* was pretty barren in the song department. *Groove* has 20 'choons'.

FREESTYLE: Fancy yourself as a B-Boy? Flail those limbs around and record it to show to your girl.

Your grade appears at the bottom of the screen and changes as the song goes on.

It had to happen eventually – with *EyeToy: Play* serving as just a taster of what Sony's latest gizmo could do, it's *EyeToy: Groove* that offers anything close to a full main course with side salad. Despite being a rather obvious rip-off of *Samba De Amigo* (without the maracas, of course), this extended version of the music mini-game found on *EyeToy: Play* has you waving your hands over on-screen indicators in time to music. Thanks to the USB camera (which you'll have to buy separately if you don't already own one), your image is projected onto the TV for everybody to see. Not requiring mastery of any peripherals means that within a matter of minutes everyone in the room will be giving it a go, and having 20 extremely well-known (if not very good) songs on the roster further amplifies this, even if that is quite a small number.

What *Eye Toy: Groove* does, it does rather well. Several difficulty levels await you, and at random moments throughout songs where you're happily dancing in the groove, you'll be told to follow dots around the screen in order to pose for a snapshot which can be viewed after the game. Then there are the Freestyle moments, where you're given a limited time to do as you please, which is recorded as video and can be saved onto a memory card. Of course, with its simple structure and limited selection of songs this disc isn't going to hold dancing-game fanatics for long – in fact, the choice and number of tracks are our major gripes with the game. But play it as intended – with lots of people who are not necessarily fully aware of what's going on – and it'll no doubt be popping in and out of your PS2 tray for a while.

To be honest, it's fairly exciting to think that software like this is where the future lies. If companies want games that will appeal to everybody, then they'll need games that'll entice non-gamers into the market. Something like the EyeToy is perfect to show people that games aren't always about hunching over a monitor by yourself on a Saturday night. Maybe on one futuristic afternoon, people will discuss Sony as a visionary that shaped interactive entertainment into its new form. Or maybe it's simply a gimmick with a USB camera…



There are only 20 tracks to choose from, and if you don't like generic floor fillers you'll get bored quite soon.

VERDICT 6/10
SHORT-LIVED FOR SOME, ANYTHING BUT FOR OTHERS

DANCE UK



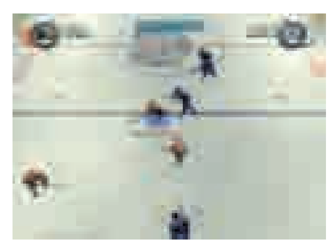
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SAMBA DE AMIGO


eMag









FORMAT REVIEWED PS2 **OTHER FORMATS** Xbox **ORIGIN** US
PUBLISHER Midway **PRICE** £39.99 **RELEASE** 21 November **PLAYERS** 1-2

MIDWAY HITZ AND MISSES AGAIN

NHL HITZ PRO

What a difference a change in direction makes, particularly when you're creating a videogame that's aimed at a very specific part of the market. Originally, *Hitz* was up there as a refreshing alternative to the likes of EA and SEGA's *NHL* offerings. Its arcade stylings were a breath of fresh air and we couldn't get enough of them. However, by 'refocusing' the game to concentrate on the realistic side of the sport, *Hitz Pro* takes the series down a new path that loses any sense of identity that it might have made for itself.

Certainly, everything that the last *Hitz* game had has been expanded upon for *Pro*, and the addition of online play is the kind of bandwagon jumping that'll win over several gamers. However, the move from three-on-three arcade hockey to a more realistic five-on-five game strips out all the gameplay of the last two titles. Combined with some slightly sloppy-looking graphics and occasional bouts of slowdown, it's just not enough to warrant attention over something like *NHL 2004*.

To be frank, we're more than a little gutted that a series we once enjoyed has been ruined in this way. Rather than offering something different as it once did, *Hitz Pro* now falls into line with every other *NHL* game available today, and against such competition it falls miserably short.



VERDICT 4/10







FORMAT Xbox **ORIGIN** US **PUBLISHER** Atari
PRICE £34.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-4

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS HEROES

ABOUT AS MUCH FUN AS BEING HIT BY A +5 MACE OF DISRUPTION

Ignore those who say Dungeons & Dragons is for geeks; five titles alone by the end of the year suggests that publishers are seeing things differently right now. Sadly, it's all of the 'dumbed down' variety, as *Dark Alliance* proved when it first appeared on the PS2 as a drastically cut-down version of *Baldur's Gate*, no doubt to make it more accessible to the broader console market.

Since then, *Knights Of The Old Republic* has shown that console owners are quite happy to play a 'hard-core' RPG, and so we're left feeling decidedly short changed by *D&D Heroes*. The game mechanics are exactly the same as those of the two-year-old *Dark Alliance* and mostly consist of mashing the A-button for all you're worth. Sure, there's the odd bit of variety when you cast a spell or throw a weapon, but it's generally a case of repeatedly wading through countless different monsters.

While the game is certainly atmospheric in places, even this does little to enhance the horribly formulaic gameplay. Hoping to spice things up, *Heroes* also includes an all-new four-player mode. Sadly, a tendency to lose track of your player amongst hordes of slathering foes and a constantly changing camera spoils any potential fun this may well have added, leaving the whole package somewhat less than we were hoping for.

VERDICT 4/10



FORMAT REVIEWED PS2 **OTHER FORMATS** Xbox **ORIGIN** US
PUBLISHER Acclaim **PRICE** £29.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-6

NBA JAM

ACCLAIM'S SHOT BOUNCES OFF THE RIM ONCE MORE

It's the oldest trick in the development book – when all attempts fail to keep a long-running franchise alive, announce that you're going back to basics in an effort to recapture the success of old. And in the case of *NBA Jam*, it nearly works too. Having virtually destroyed the reputation of the series with several pitiful releases, Acclaim's attempt at revitalising interest in the classic arcade licence is relatively successful. To a point.

You see, the big problem here is that with a definitive arcade-style basketball game on the market in the form of *NBA Street 2*, *NBA Jam* has a lot of work to do in order to come out on top – something that it doesn't achieve, despite a hard-fought effort.

Retaining elements like the original commentator and being able to set your players 'on fire' by scoring constantly certainly brings back happy memories. However, the slightly clumsy controls and overly enthusiastic (read: nearly unbeatable) AI, plus with a new Hot Spot system that feels very random, makes the whole game feel rather lopsided and not much fun.

It could have been a contender, but feels more like an also-ran – particularly when you consider that you can pick up a Mega Drive and *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition* on eBay for the same price.



VERDICT 5/10



FORMAT REVIEWED Xbox **ORIGIN** US **PUBLISHER** Microsoft
PRICE £39.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1

IT GIVES 'PINS AND NEEDLES' A WHOLE NEW MEANING

VOODOO VINCE

So, *Blinx* with a voodoo doll. Any takers? Thought not – although to be fair, *Voodoo Vince* isn't actually as bland as it first looks. Despite its rather generic opening (that lasts for a good few levels), *Voodoo Vince* hides a surprisingly good game beneath the standard head slamming and general collecting of random objects inherent in so many other platformers.

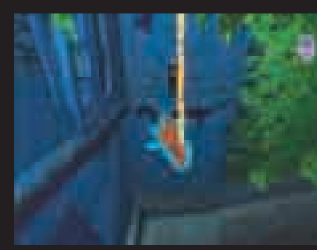
Miffed at the kidnapping of his beloved keeper, Charmaine, Vince begins his search for her in a wonderfully warped and twisted New Orleans. Being a voodoo doll though, Vince is able to inflict pain upon others – anything from getting stabbed by a pair of scissors to being encased in an iron maiden – by first inflicting it upon himself.

While this ability is used extremely well in the many inventive boss encounters, however, the rest of the game limits it to little more than an amusing smart bomb and ultimately it becomes yet another flash gimmick. It's a real shame, as Beep Industries' interpretation of New Orleans is refreshingly unique and *Voodoo Vince*'s tone throughout is reminiscent of Rare's highly enjoyable *Conker's Bad Fur Day*.

Visuals are colourful, solid and show great use of textures and Vince himself is extremely well animated, while the incredibly quirky soundtrack helps to make for an enjoyable, solid and yet oh-so-generic title – if only the latter wasn't actually the case…

VERDICT 6/10







FORMAT REVIEWED PC **OTHER FORMATS** PS2, Xbox, GC **ORIGIN** UK
PUBLISHER SEGA **PRICE** £29.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-16

NEW DIMENSIONS OF THE THIRD KIND

WORMS 3D

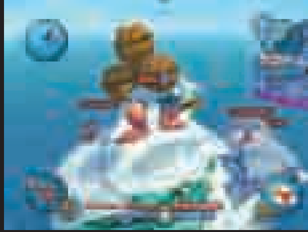
With the limitations of the X- and Y-axis rapidly bringing down the curtain on the glory days of 2D gaming, even the most enduring franchises must rise to the challenge of life in the 3D sphere or face extinction. Among the latest former giants leaving their 2D home behind is cheery turn-based classic *Worms*, but will the transition open up a whole new dimension of possibilities for the series or has the curse of the Z-axis claimed yet another big-name scalp?

■ To a certain extent *Worms 3D* manages to successfully convert most of the original content for use in the 3D realm, and makes good use of the literal addition of depth to broaden the strategic scope available to players. Sadly though, the change inherently introduces a new level of complexity to the age-old gameplay mechanics that heavily contradicts the series' famously accessible charm. A clumsy overhead camera and invaluable first-person view attempt to tame the new 3D perspective, yet, while aiding directional targeting, the trajectory of your shots is virtually impossible to judge.

■ The game's unique appeal has always depended upon its delightful simplicity, making previous chapters in the legacy a must for post-pub multiplayer hilarity. While *Worms 3D* essentially delivers what it says on the tin, in surrendering its intuitive interface the concept has evolved into a far less attractive proposition. A shame.

VERDICT 4/10









FORMAT PC **ORIGIN** Czech Republic **PUBLISHER** Cenega
PRICE £29.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1

UFO: AFTERMATH

THIS PLANET AIN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR THE BOTH OF US…

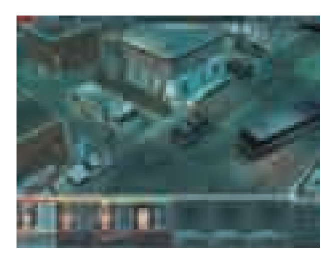
The lack of tactical control in the heat of battle that's generally associated with real-time strategy has often left us yearning for a more calculated strategic interface, yet the traditional turn-based alternatives that do permit a more premeditated approach tend to sacrifice any kind of flow to the action. So perhaps the most intriguing element of *UFO: Aftermath* is the happy medium it manages to find between these two very different control schemes.

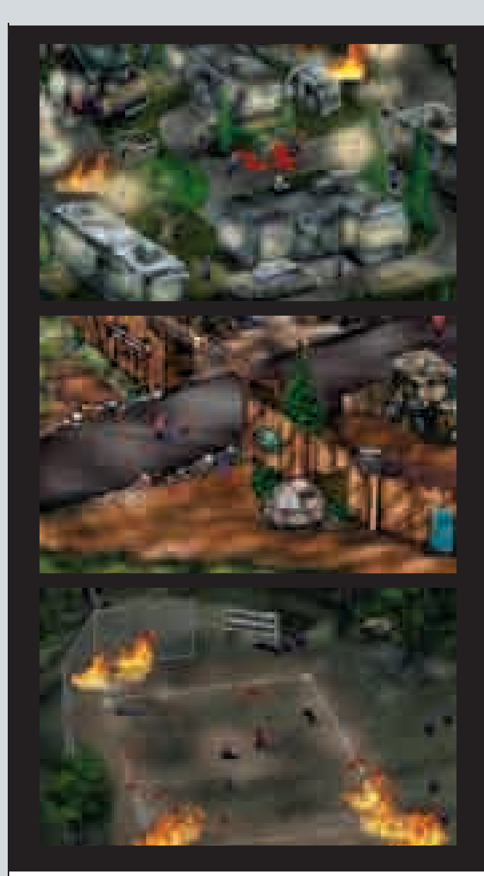
□ Primarily running in real time, the action pauses with every event that occurs and allows players to reconsider their movements in the light of the new situation. The bulk of the gameplay action sees players dispatching small teams of resistance fighters to undertake various tactical missions as part of a global effort to rid the Earth of its new alien rulers following a devastating biological attack that virtually eradicated humankind. By selecting the missions of maximum strategic value, expanding your base of operations, levelling-up your squad members and conducting vital research into enemy technology you'll orchestrate an epic campaign to kick the invaders out.

□ Sadly, the promising squad-based interface is put to incredibly uninspiring use that produces consistently dull gameplay against some hideously primitive backdrops. Despite the impressive scope, this lacklustre playing experience offers little incentive to persevere and explore the strategic depth on offer.

VERDICT 4/10









FORMAT PC **ORIGIN** US **PUBLISHER** Whiptail Interactive
PRICE £9.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-16

POSTAL: CLASSIC AND UNCUT

HERE'S ONE FOR 'THE FANS'

Damn you, attraction for unnecessary violence – it's your fault that games like *Postal* are worth considering for even a moment. While at least *Postal 2* had a few decent ideas about how to dish out punishment to your hapless victims, the original *Postal* made for some painful playing when it first came out in 1997 – if you managed to get hold of it before it was banned, that is. If you didn't though, here's your chance to give it a whirl. Though we're not sure you'll want to…

■ The biggest problem here is that *Postal* hasn't aged well at all; not a good thing when it didn't look or sound too good, or play that well six years ago. The controls are clunky and unintuitive, the unique hand-drawn backgrounds fail to cover up the blocky character sprites that look like they were created on a Spectrum, and the vocal talent sounds like a bunch of people who've simply been locked in a garage with a microphone. Because of all this, the actual 'getting to blow people away with all manner of weapons' bit lacks punch and, sadly, that's all there is to do; if you're hoping for a choice in the matter (as in *Postal 2*'s pacifist option), you're out of luck here.

■ Even for less than a tenner, it's hard to recommend buying *Postal* – particularly when Rockstar has the original (and far superior) *Grand Theft Auto* available for download on its website for free.

VERDICT 2/10









FORMAT REVIEWED PS2 **OTHER FORMATS** Xbox, GC, PC, PSone, GBA **ORIGIN** Canada
PUBLISHER EA Sports **PRICE** £39.99 **RELEASE** Out Now **PLAYERS** 1-8

CAN THE ALL-STAR LINE-UP FINALLY DELIVER?

FIFA FOOTBALL 2004

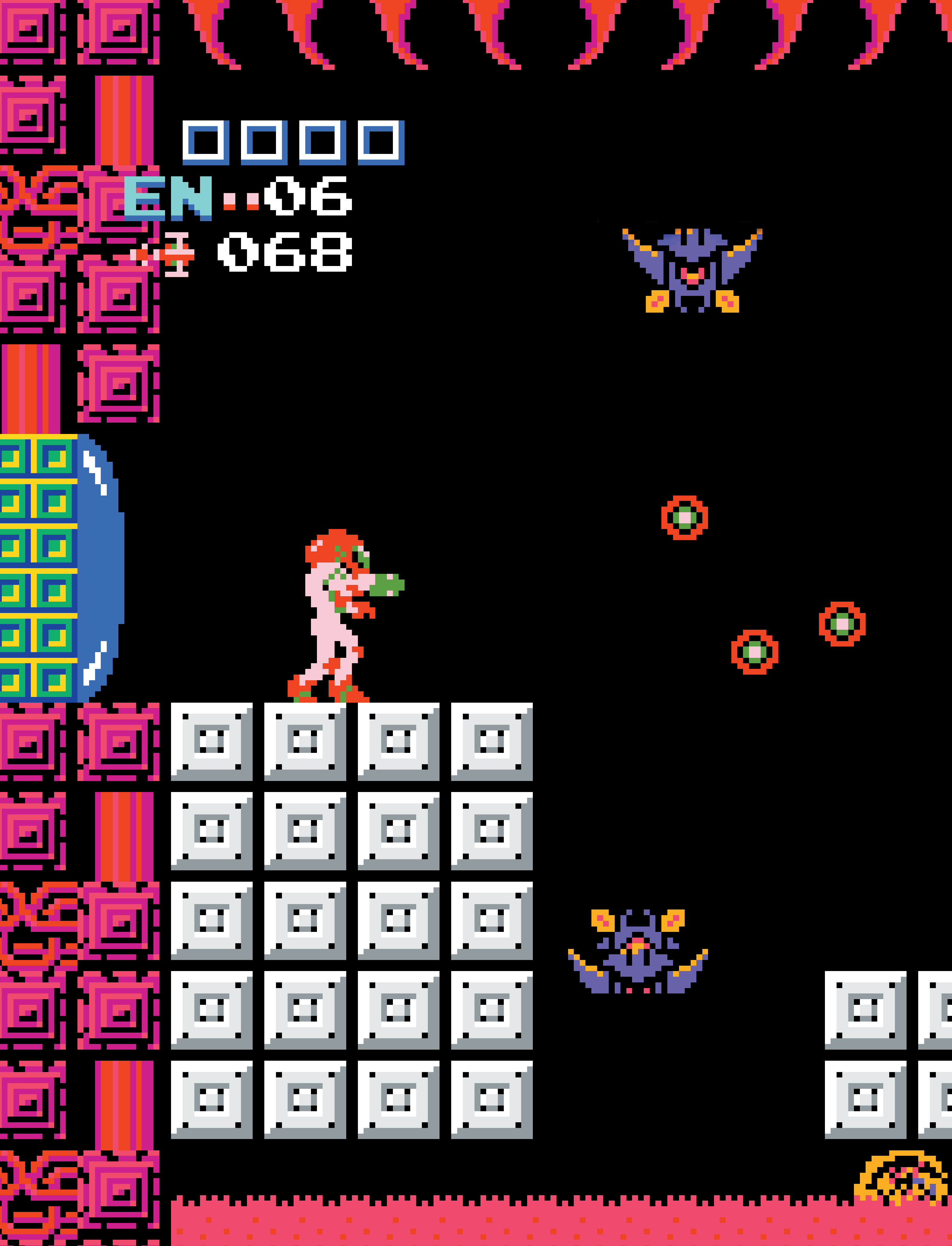
Inevitable comparisons with *Pro Evolution*'s world-beating gameplay will put the latest instalment of EA's *FIFA* series up against one of the toughest benchmarks in gaming, but with an abundance of mouth-watering new features could this year's edition have an outside chance of threatening Konami's crown? True to form, *FIFA Football 2004* falls a good way short of outclassing its Japanese rival on the pitch, but that's not to say it doesn't put up a reasonably good fight. While turning is still rather laboured and *Pro Evo*'s fluid dynamics are some way from being matched, refined animations give proceedings a slightly more natural feel.

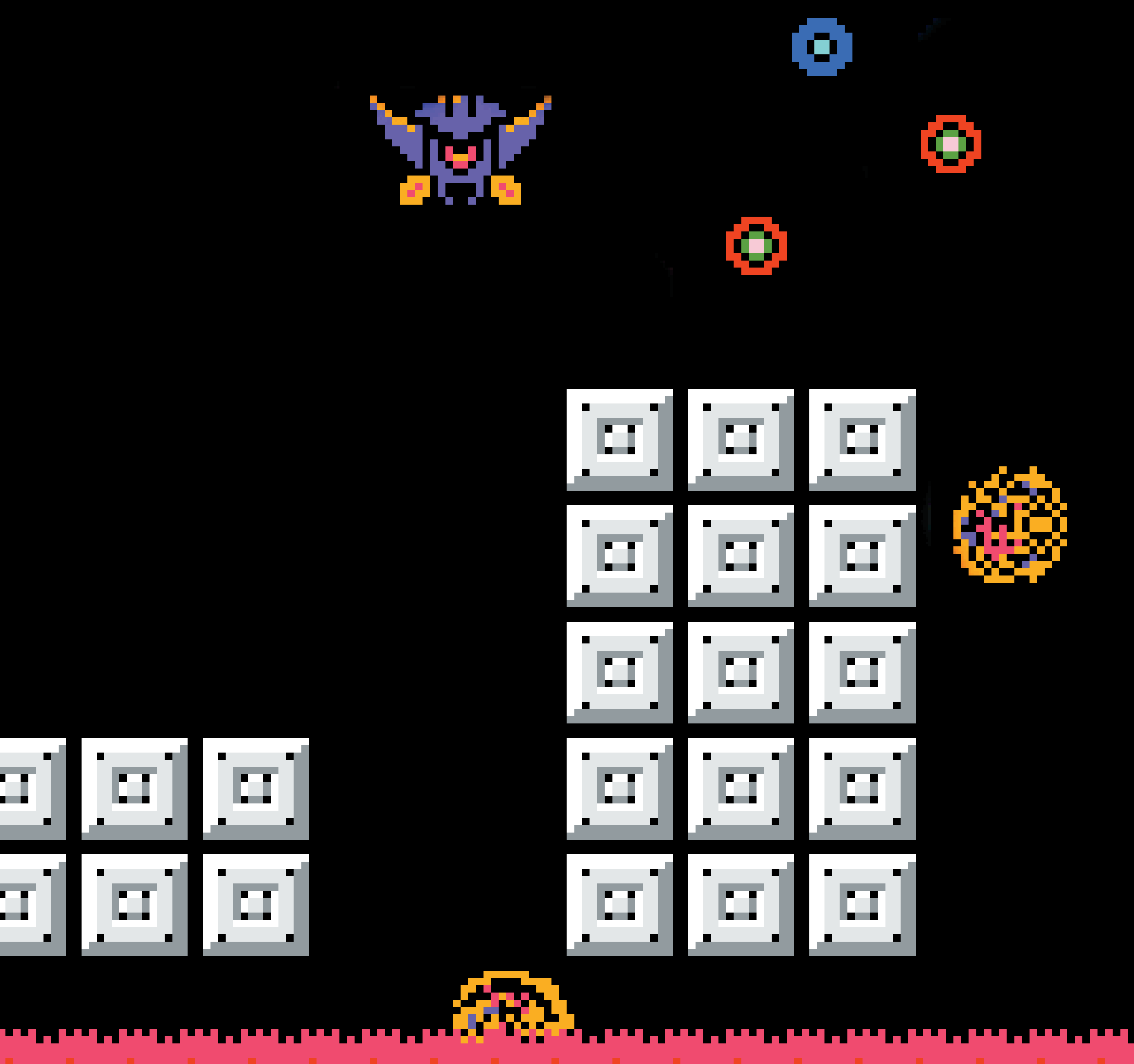
□ It's off the pitch that *FIFA* holds all the aces. New fully licensed leagues – including all three Nationwide divisions – take the player tally to around10,000, while authentic kits and official player likenesses will once again have Konami green with envy.

□ *Pro Evo* fans would similarly give their right thumb to have *FIFA*'s online capabilities and, with an impressive new Career mode adding an engrossing managerial element to the package, EA certainly wins the peripheral battle. But no matter how it comes dressed, the core gameplay action is all that really matters, and even with its overly ambitious new 'Off The Ball™' interface the *FIFA* series is still a long way from capturing the true essence of the beautiful game.



VERDICT 6/10


EN..06
068



Never underestimate a lady in a Varia Suit… **Metroid NES [Nintendo] 1986**


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.12 NOVEMBER 2003
RETRO
00p
MICRO GAMES
MATCH DAY
Replay some of the greatest soccer games of all time with our football family tree!
SUPER MARIO WORLD
Plumbers, turtles and the greatest game ever!
CAPCOM LOOKBACK
Did Resident Evil kill Mega Man?
64-BIT GAMING AT ITS BEST!
NINTENDO 64
Take a trip down memory lane with this classic gaming machine
TAKE THE BULLET
Whatever happened to this unique Dreamcast shoot-'em-up?



FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING…

It's amazing that gamers continue to argue about which consoles and games are better than others. Once it was Spectrum versus Commodore, then SNES versus Mega Drive, and now it's PS2 versus Xbox versus GameCube. And then there are gamers who argue that retro titles are better than new releases (and vice versa). So who's right?

The answer, of course, is everyone and no-one. They say that a console is only as good as its games, and it's hard to think of a system that didn't have at least one decent title. Besides, who cares if the Xbox can display three more polygons than the PS2, or that the Mega Drive couldn't rotate sprites like the SNES? At the end of the day you're never going to see *Ico* on Xbox or *Halo* on PS2, just as *Sonic* was never released for the SNES and you couldn't get *Mario* for the Mega Drive.

There are always going to be good, bad and average games. And that's before you've taken personal opinion into account. So stop worrying about what everybody else thinks and get on with having some fun.

Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

Capcom Goes Hyper

At last, the game that Street Fighter II fans have been waiting for

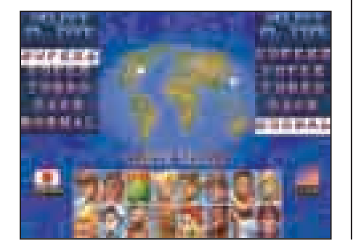
Capcom has revealed its plans to release a brand new version of *Street Fighter II*. Entitled *Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition*, this PS2 collection has been created to celebrate 15 years of Capcom's popular series.

Based on the *Super Street Fighter II: Turbo* graphics engine, *HSFII* looks set to deliver the ultimate fighting experience for fans of the series. The new title will incorporate all the character moves, animations and endings from *SFII: The World Warrior*, *SFII: Dash (Championship Edition)*, *SFII Turbo: Hyper Fighting*, *Super SFII* and *Super SFII: Turbo*.

You'll get the option to choose which version of a character you wish to play as – for example, *World Warrior* Chun Li doesn't have a projectile, whereas *Super Turbo* Chun Li has both a Fireball and a Super Move – the choice is yours. It's believed that a selection of different versions of each background may also be available, though the first screenshots only show the *Super SFII: Turbo* arenas in use.

Due to launch here next spring, the game will be released in Japan on 18 December for ¥3,800 (about £20). A special edition package featuring a *History Of Street Fighter* DVD, phone strap and mouse mat will also be available for ¥8,800.





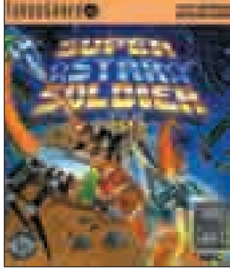


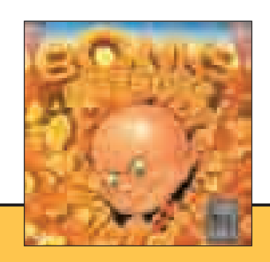
Old For New

Hudson announces four retro remakes

***Bomberman* developer Hudson Soft has revealed its plans to release four retro remakes for PS2 and GameCube this Christmas.** Entitled *Hudson Selection Vol. 1-4*, the games on offer include *Cubic Lode Runner*, *Star Soldier*, *Bonk's Adventure* and *Adventure Island*, each sold on its own disc.

Similar to SEGA's Ages series (though hopefully not as poorly realised), the *Hudson Selection* series will feature updated versions of the games, complete with 3D visuals and, in some cases, completely reworked level designs. Whether or not they'll match the quality of the original PC Engine and NES releases remains to be seen.

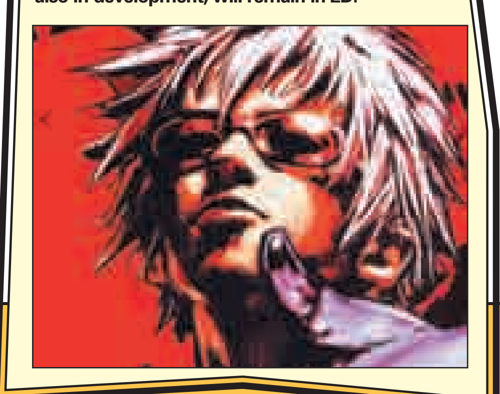




SNK's classic series to go 3D

New Dimension For King Of Fighters

After nine years of sublime 2D fighting action, SNK has confirmed that the *King Of Fighters* series will finally make the switch to 3D. The announcement (which was complete with an FMV sequence featuring CG models of some of the game's characters) took place at the recent Tokyo Game Show and revealed that *KOF 3D* is already well into development and should launch on PS2 next summer. But don't despair just yet, *KOF 2003*, also in development, will remain in 2D.



This Month In 1984



Although videogames became increasingly popular during the early Eighties, 1984 would prove to be a difficult year. Still, there were more than enough decent movies released to keep us going until the launch of the NES the following year…

UK CHARTS FOR NOV 1984

1. I Feel You
Chaka Khan

2. Wild Boys
Duran Duran

3. Freedom
Wham!

4. The Wanderer
Status Quo

5. Caribbean Queen (No More Love On The Run)
Billy Ocean

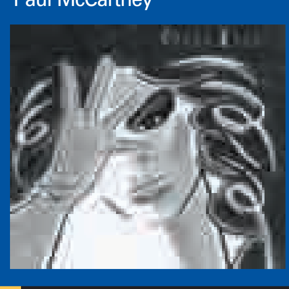
6. All Cried Out
Alison Moyet

7. I Should Have Known Better
Jim Diamond

8. NeverEnding Story
Limahl

9. Too Late For Goodbyes
Julian Lennon

10. No More Lonely Nights (Ballad)
Paul McCartney



MOVIES IN 1984 (AMERICA)

1. Ghost Busters
Grossed $238,600,000

2. Beverly Hills Cop
Grossed $234,760,500

3. Gremlins
Grossed $148,170,000

4. The Karate Kid
Grossed $90,800,000

5. Police Academy
Grossed $81,200,000

6. Splash
Grossed $62,100,000

7. Bachelor Party
Grossed $38,400,000

8. The Terminator
Grossed $36,900,000

9. The Killing Fields
Grossed $34,600,000

10. A Nightmare On Elm Street
Grossed $25,504,5131



▶ "Symmetrical book stacking, just like he Philadelphia mass turbulence of 1947."

GAMING NEWS NOV '84

Atari Continues To Rebuild Its Credibility

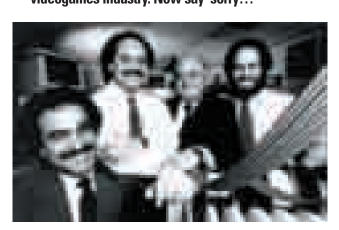
It's no great secret that after an incredibly prosperous period Atari was at the heart of the videogame crash that put many companies out of business during 1984. The situation had been much to blame on Atari's over-production of its products; we need not remind you of the abysmal translation of Namco's *Pac-Man* or the laughable piece of programming that was *E.T.*

Some of those worst affected by the situation were the high-street stores, which had constantly lost money on poor-quality titles that they simply couldn't sell, no matter what the price. Obviously, this put Atari in a difficult position – even if it could turn the business around it would still have to convince retailers to stock its products again.

The company had recently been acquired by its ex-vice president of software, Dr. Leonard Tramiel, who now had the delicate task of streamlining the workforce, as well as cutting production costs. Interestingly, his first announcement (which came this month in 1984) didn't discuss the many job losses that had come as a result of poor business planning, nor did it attempt to reassure the industry that the depression was over. Instead, he focused all his attention on the future – surely a new line of 16- and 32-bit computers would be the answer to the company's problems.



▲ E.T., you berk, you single-handedly destroyed the videogames industry. Now say sorry…



But while his intentions may have seemed misguided, Tramiel had apparently spent a great deal of time prior to the conference in talks with retail outlets, and according to reports he had been a great ambassador for the company. Sadly, despite his best efforts, a further 5,000 Atari employees were made redundant just one month later.

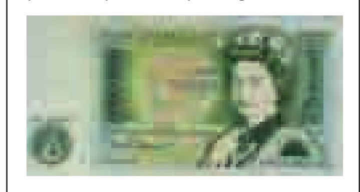
I•N T•H•E N•E•W•S



IN FOR A PENNY, IN FOR A POUND...

It was in this month in 1984 that the UK finally said goodbye to the pound note, after more than 150 years in service. The pound coin had been introduced just seven months previously, and despite a general lack of enthusiasm from the British public, there were many obvious advantages that it had over the note.

It was more convenient for blind people as it was easier to distinguish next to other coins than the pound note was to other notes. It also lasted longer – although it was slightly more expensive to manufacture, it was suggested that a pound coin would last up to 50 times longer than a pound note. Though that didn't stop people with too much change complaining it was too heavy…



▶ Very hard to fold up to put in arcade cabinets…

Why Don't They Remake...

CHASE HQ

BUCKLE UP FOR A CRIM-CATCHING SPEED-FEST

Released: **1988**
Publisher: **Taito**
Developer: **In-House**
Format: **Arcade**

"Lets go, Mr Driver!" If you were a child growing up during the late Eighties, chances are this was one of most vivid phrases you'll remember from your local arcade. Feeding off the then cool *Miami Vice*, Taito's *Chase HQ* thrust the player into a modified Porsche and encouraged them to act out all their Don Johnson fantasies.

Starting off with that classic catchphrase, HQ's Nancy then filled you in on the whereabouts of your latest suspect. What followed was an exhilarating 60 seconds of high-speed racing that involved a desperate chase to reach your perpetrator's flash motor before he got past the city's border.

Once sighted, you were then allowed a further 60 seconds to bring your errant foe to justice. And the easiest solution? Why, simply ramming the hell out of him, of course. Naturally, this was easier said then done when you were travelling in excess of 240 km/h and having to deal with busy downtown traffic.



▲ Catch up with the perp, run him off the road then cuff him. All in a day's work…

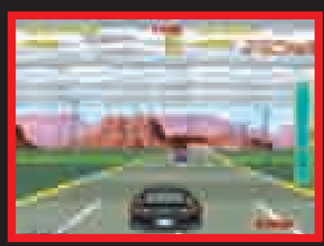
You've got to hand it to Taito – it took the high-octane thrills and flashy visuals of Yu Suzuki's *Out Run* and delivered yet another new spin on a rapidly tiring genre. There was so much more to *Chase HQ* than simply bringing criminals to justice, though.

For starters, you'd get an overtaking bonus whenever you passed civilian traffic, and if you were good enough it was possible to rack up some insane scores by the time you reached the fleeing criminal.

The speed boost was another feature that required plenty of practice to master. While many would use it in an attempt to catch their quarry, it was best saved for when you actually caught up with them. Of course, the downside of saving your boosts for the final push was that it was all too easy to overshoot the target and lose precious seconds. And believe us, every second counted with this tricky game.



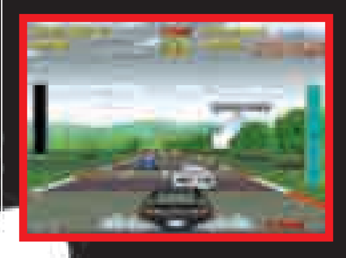
▲ You've got to tackle some downtown traffic, although it's looking kind of quiet right now.



Predictably, *Chase HQ* spawned a number of sequels (as well as home conversions, from the NES to the Saturn) that brought additional features to the standard gameplay. For example, it later became possible to shoot at your opponents with guns, and the visuals were more advanced. Even so, there's something endearing about the original that the follow-ups simply couldn't match.

Saying that, we'd still love to see an update running on current gaming technology, and rumours suggest that such a thing may well be on the cards. Until then, we'll just have to make do with the pursuit mode in Criterion's superb *Burnout 2*.





This Month's Favourites

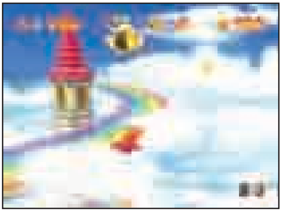
SUPER MARIO WORLD

We had no choice but to spend plenty of time with *Super Mario World* this month (see pages 136-7). Nintendo's finest hour? Possibly…



SUPER MARIO 64

A new direction for Mario. We're not sure it matches the excellence of *Super Mario World*, but it breathed new life into a tired genre.



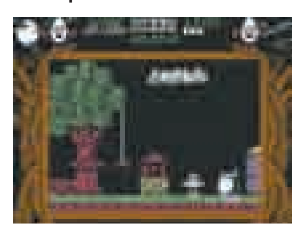
DARK STALKERS: THE NIGHT WARRIORS

Capcom's famous for *SFII*, but also made other great fighting games such as *Dark Stalkers*. This title featured many colourful characters.



DIZZY: THE ULTIMATE CARTOON ADVENTURE

Simple in concept and style, the *Dizzy* games offer just about everything you could ever wish for from a platformer.



LOOK BACK IN ANGER

Strange as it may sound, Leisure Suit Larry managed to make the pursuit of lovely ladies more of a chore than a pleasure. Here's how…

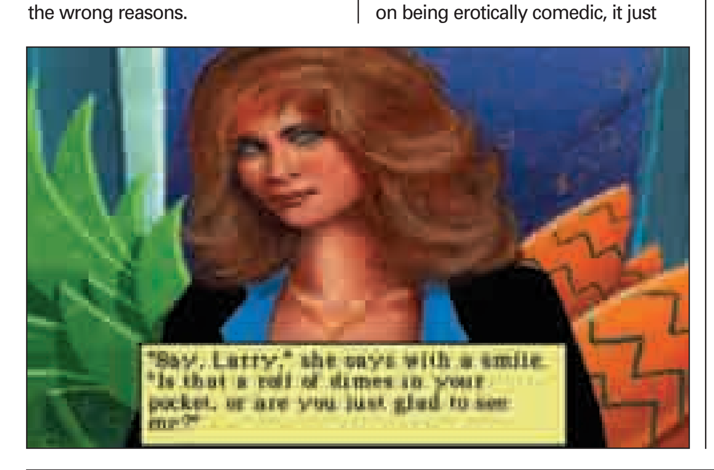
Ah, to be a teenager again. The underage consumption of Diamond White, shouting swear words at complete strangers, egging each other on to try and buy porn from the local cornershop… it's pretty sweet living. Of course, back when we were adolescents, even playing certain games seemed taboo – while 18-rated titles like *Grand Theft Auto* were still some way off, at least we could cackle with glee at our copies of *Penthouse Squares* and *Sam Fox Strip Poker*. Of all the games that we weren't supposed to be playing, though, the one that kept us glued to our PCs for hours had to be the early games in the *Leisure Suit Larry* series. But we can see it was for all the wrong reasons.

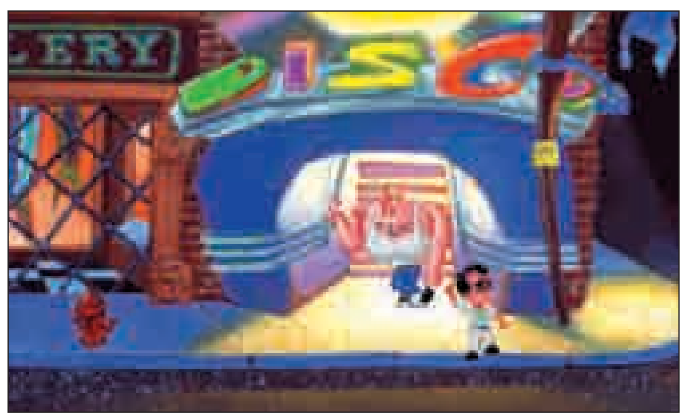
You see, we could empathise with Larry back then, simply because he suffered from the same problems we did (albeit from a middle-aged perspective) – no matter what he tried, the ladies just weren't interested. Thus, the stage was set; help Larry meet women and, ultimately, get his end away. Back in 1987, it seemed like the perfect premise for an adventure game – especially since it meant we got to look at badly drawn pictures of non-real women without many clothes on. Pixelated nudity, the best kind…

Unfortunately, there were several drawbacks that stand out even more now that we go back and revisit the earlier episodes of the game. For starters, for a game that prided itself on being erotically comedic, it just wasn't funny. With more 'ba-dum, tish!' jokes and bad innuendos than a Lenny Beige gig, even the hormone-addled brain of your average teenager would find it hard to crack a grin more than once.

Even worse, for a series of games that required extensive exploration to succeed, all the *Leisure Suit Larry* titles took great pleasure in killing Larry off at every opportunity, usually as a result of you doing something that seemed right. Flushing the toilet after you've used it? Oh, you've drowned. Going around a corner into an alleyway? Nope, you've been killed by an unseen mugger. Even getting to do what seems natural comes with a price – achieve the impossible with a lady of the night and five minutes later your manhood explodes unless you remembered to use protection. And does it tell you where to buy said protection? Er, no, that requires more exploration and therefore possible death. Even the most hard-core leisure suit owners must have been spinning in their graves…

▲ Larry, buddy, she's oozing – you really don't want to go down that path, do you?





LAST MONTH'S AMIGA 500 SCREENSHOTS

There were plenty of screenshots last month, so we didn't expect you to get them all…

FIRST ROW
Wings Of Fury
Katakis
Paradroid
Netherworld
Blaster
Push Over
Wing Commander
Turrican
Stunt Cars 2
Overlander

SECOND ROW
James Pond: Underwater Agent
Gunship
Enlightenment
Last Lap
Risk
Honda RVF
Winter Games
Elite
Wonderboy In Monsterland
Uridium 2

THIRD ROW
Defender Of The Crown
Zool
Parasol Stars
Golden Axe
Lotus Turbo Challenge
It Came From The Desert
Assassin
Rick Dangerous
Pipe Dreams
Super Hang-On

FOURTH ROW
Rodland
Nebulus
Xenon 2
Lemmings
Nuclear War
Chaos Engine
World Games
Buggy Boy
Lotus Turbo Challenge 2
Gemz

FIFTH ROW
Marble Madness
Worms
Cannon Fodder
North And South
Zool 2
Flashback
Flood
Dungeon Master
Mr. Nutz
Mortal Kombat 2

SIXTH ROW
Chuck Rock
Shanghai
Turrican 2
Shadow Of The Beast
Great Gianna Sisters
Ikari Warriors
Traders
I.K. Plus
Hunter
Oskar

SEVENTH ROW
Predator
Great Courts 2
Gravity Force
Super Raid
Ports Of Call
Seven Cities Of Gold
Cabal
The Secret Of Monkey Island
Populous
Rick Dangerous 2

EIGHTH ROW
Alien Breed
Aquatic Games
Railroad Tycoon
Emerald Mine
Bug Bash
Indianapolis 500
Fire & Ice
Test Drive
Sensible World Of Soccer
Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantas



S·U·P·E·R M·A·R·I·O W·O·R·L·D

Greatest RETRO Game Ever

Title: **Super Mario World**
Format: **SNES**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-House**
Price: **£49.99**
Release Date: **1992**

FORGET THE GREATEST RETRO GAME EVER, THIS COULD WELL BE THE GREATEST GAME EVER, FULL STOP

When Nintendo launched the SNES in 1992, it needed to prove that its new technology was worthy of our attention. And what better way to do that than by ensuring that a healthy selection of quality games were available to buy alongside the machine. Classics such as *F-Zero* and *Super Soccer* were included in the line-up, though it was Nintendo's much-loved plumber who undoubtedly attracted the most attention.

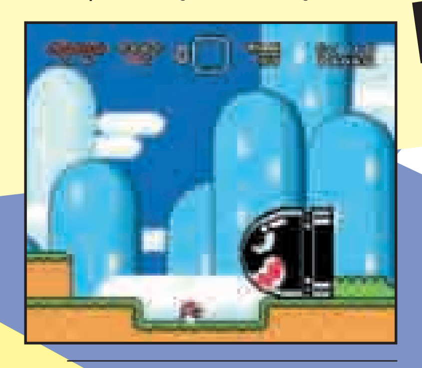
As the fourth game in the *Super Mario* series, *Super Mario World* certainly had its work cut out. The original game had been adored by gamers everywhere, while the third instalment had wowed the industry with its impressive technical achievements and sheer size. Amazingly, Nintendo managed to better every single element seen in the first three games by a significant margin.

Although on first impressions the game looked much like its predecessors (albeit with nicer sprites and more colours), it didn't take long to discover that Shigeru Miyamoto and his team of artists and programmers had used the SNES technology to implement a number of quirky gameplay features. One of the most memorable technological achievements was sprite scaling and how it was used to enhance the boss encounters. This varied between rotating the characters as they moved around the room, or rotating the platforms they stood on, either in the style of a ferris wheel or a seesaw. In fact, the seesaw sections were particularly ingenious, as they required the player to stomp on the boss's head only when the platform tipped towards the lava, causing them to slip off. Such features may seem simplistic now, but at the time the effect was breathtaking.

It wasn't just the technological side of the game that was impressive either – the design 'concept' was of an equally high standard. Rather than drawing everything in the sort of eye-catching detail that some SNES games were displaying, Nintendo purposely kept things clean and fresh. Distant hills, trees and other background elements were hinted at with simple geometric shapes, while closer scenery was highlighted with slightly busier, abstract patterns. This look was complemented by the clever use of colour; soft, pastel shades were used for much of the scenery, while more vibrant tones were used for the foreground.

But aside from all this wonderful creativity, it was the tried-and-tested *Mario* gameplay that shone through above all else. Although Nintendo is known for innovation, *Super Mario World* brought very few new gameplay features to the platform

▲ Platforms, power-ups and, er, small dinosaurs. The quintessential ingredients for a *Mario* game.



▲ Familiar enemies from previous *Mario* titles showed their faces again, and some were bigger than ever.

genre. Instead, the game was more a collaboration of all the best bits of the previous *Mario* titles, perfectly blended and used in just the right quantities. The world map, for instance, was beautifully realised yet still incredibly functional, while each of the levels featured just the right number of secret exits and collectable items.

Of course, *Mario 64* would eventually eclipse the level of hype and coverage that *Super Mario World* received – after all, it was hard not to be impressed with what Nintendo achieved in its first ever three-dimensional platform romp. Even so, there's no real dispute as to which was the superior game. *Super Mario World* offered far more replay value, as well as more precise gameplay, more levels, better power-ups and a more rounded difficulty setting. In fact, it's one of around half a dozen or so SNES games that we continue to enjoy even now.

The sad thing is that when you compare such sublime game structure to Nintendo's recent offerings, such as *Luigi's Mansion* and *Super Mario Sunshine*, it's hard not to feel that the company has lost a little of its sparkle.

Mario Maths

With so much to offer, it's hard to pick out the individual ingredients that made Super Mario World such a wonderful game. But here are a few of the choicest cuts…

Start



+



+



The World Map

Like *Super Mario Bros 3*, *Super Mario World* featured a map that linked all the levels together. Like so many other sections of the game, this was kept simple and functional, allowing the player to maintain a clear idea of their exact position in Dinosaur Land. And who could forget names like Cheese Bridge Area?

Abstract Imagery

Almost all the scenery in *Super Mario World* was abstract in design. Mountains, forests, castles and haunted mansions were drawn using simple shapes, colours and patterns. Contrary to what you might expect, though, the game still looked vibrant and full of life, rather than appearing bland.

Power-Ups

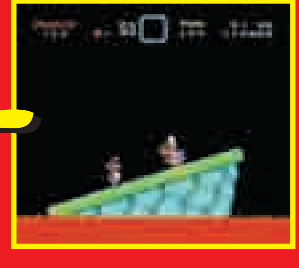
Although *SMW* featured fewer power-ups than *Super Mario Bros 3*, those that did exist were far better implemented and more integral to the gameplay. The Cape, for instance, was particularly memorable and required a certain level of skill to master, especially when it came to reaching secret platforms.



+



+



Classic Mario

Many of the popular characters and locations seen in previous *Mario* games were resurrected and updated for *SMW*. Ghost Houses, for example, contained hundreds of hovering Boos, as well as the Big Boo himself. And just look at those lovely transparency effects. Mmm, transparency…

Bowser's Back

Still keeping things simple, the storyline told of how Princess Daisy had been kidnapped by Bowser (again). No genius gimmicks, no unnecessarily complex scripting, just enough of a plot to carry Mario's platforming antics from one area of Dinosaur Land to the next. Who needs tricksy cut-scenes, eh?

Super Effects

Although *Yoshi's Island* would later take the SNES technology to its limits (with a little help from the Super FX chip), *Super Mario World* certainly did a good job of showing what the Super Nintendo was capable of. Sprite scaling was used sparingly to subtly enhance many of the boss battles.



+



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Finish



96 Exits

Many of the levels featured multiple exits that opened up secret areas and additional levels on the map. In all there were 96 exits, some of which required a huge amount of skill from the player to find. It was also possible to get to Bowser's castle in about 15 minutes if you knew which exits to look for.

Jolly Green Dinosaur

Yoshi was introduced in *SMW* and has since become one of Nintendo's most popular characters – he's even starred in his own games. Although his presence did little to enhance the gameplay, it was nice to see another 'goody' joining Mario.

Gaming Perfection

So there you have it. With all these elements (as well as many others) *Super Mario World* is possibly the greatest game ever. Perhaps Miyamoto should have played through this again before arming Mario with that ridiculous water cannon.

C·Y·B·O·R·G J·U·S·T·I·C·E

Great Retro Gaming Moments

Format(s): **Mega Drive**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **In-House**
Release date: **1993**

When trying to find a retro game that dared to be different, the scrolling beat-'em-up genre is not typically the first place you'd look. Usually the domain of the muscle-bound man mountain and his one-move vigilante assault on crime, SEGA's metallic take on the scrolling fighter did much more than just replace the heroes with robots (they may profess to be cyborgs, but we're not convinced). We won't claim this was the best beat-'em-up ever – repetitive and fiddly, the game had its fair share of flaws, but at the same time it had more than enough innovation to make up for it.

To begin with, you had to assemble a mechanical creation from a wide range of parts on offer, enabling over two hundred unique combatants if the official blurb was believed. Buzz saws, tank tracks, hydraulics… the list of appendages goes on. The key feature that endeared *Cyborg Justice* to many wasn't so much this array of individual components so much as the way these were worked into the game's combat system.

In the heat of a battle, one of the trickier moves to execute allowed the player-controlled cyber-warrior to lunge at his opponent and attempt to rip off a limb. Should this be successful, the benefits were twofold – not only was the foe left in a weakened state but you were able to hurl the stolen body part back at its owner or switch it with one of your own to add insult to injury. (Before adding further injury, of course.)

Better still, the weakened opponent could be tapped for yet further good – given the chance, you could wrench a torso clean off, killing the victim outright in order to boost your own health. But the technical wizardry didn't stop there. As well as thoroughly disassembling your opponents and salvaging the best bits, the player was given the rather odd ability to rebuild his or her fallen foes.

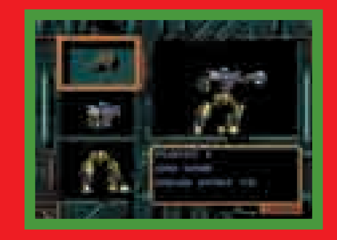
Why you'd want to go through the massively complicated procedure only to make your life

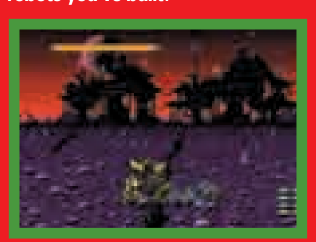


▼ Using your opponent's own arm against him is deliciously ironic, don't you think?

harder bemuses us to this day, but the process did have one major plus – Co-operative mode was made all the simpler by the fact that your fallen comrade could be pieced back together to rejoin the battle. It's rare that a feature such as this can make a game worth playing, but in this case it really did, and the feeling of bringing your ally back to life just in the nick of time is wonderfully rewarding.

Go on, treat yourself – what's a few quid when you'll be able to tell your friends about all the cool robots you've built?



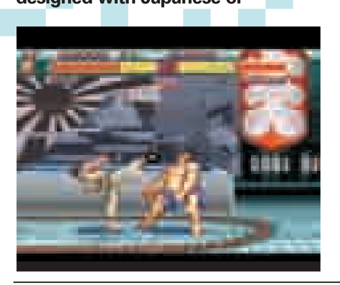


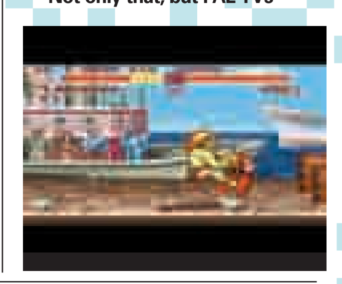
YOU'RE BUGGING ME

This month we've decided to point out a problem that has bugged us for years – one which only ever seems to affect European console games. Due to the differences between NTSC and PAL television formats, games designed with Japanese or American systems in mind run 17.5 per cent slower in Europe. Okay, this might not matter too much in an RPG, but when racing games or any title marketed on its speed (*Sonic*, for instance) are played at less than full-pelt they're a bit lame.

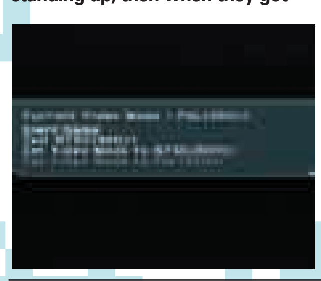
Not only that, but PAL TVs feature a greater number of horizontal pixel lines, which makes imported (or poorly translated) games run in widescreen. This affected games like *Street Fighter* the worst, as characters would look short and fat while they were standing up, then when they got knocked down they'd look strangely elongated.

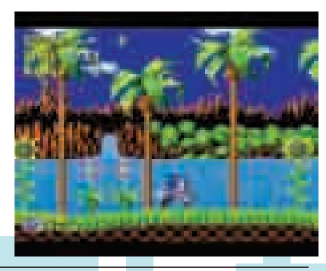
Nowadays it isn't such a problem – many games are coded with widescreen TVs in mind, while others tend to be adjusted to make the most of the additional pixel lines on offer.



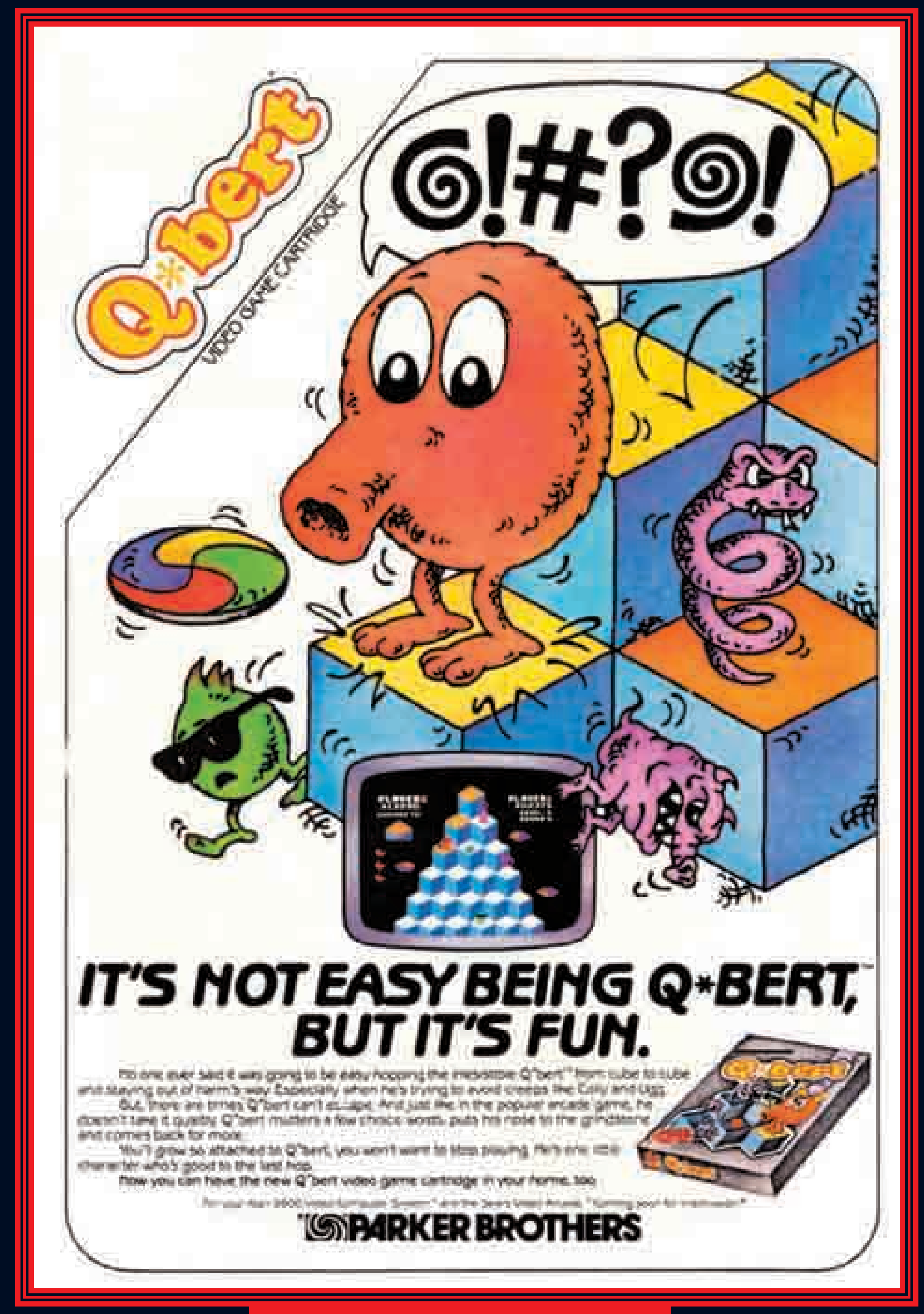


▲ The compression of a PAL image isn't kind on Blanka's already rather chunky thighs…





▲ Some televisions now let you select either PAL or NTSC modes, so there's no slowdown in speedy games.



Q*bert (Atari 2600) Parker Brothers, 1983 – American advertisement



Better late than never... The N64's release was constantly delayed, but we didn't mind waiting for a console this good. And the games weren't bad either

On 23 June 1996, the Nintendo 64 finally launched in Japan after numerous delays. The system was originally supposed to go on sale in 1995, though a lack of complete software had forced Nintendo to postpone the release date on several occasions. This was a difficult time for the company – Sony had launched the PlayStation in Japan back in December '94, and despite Nintendo's best efforts to keep public interest high, it was already clear that Sony was going to be a tough rival. The problem wasn't just the head start that the PlayStation had over the N64, but also how the two formats were being perceived by the development community. Not only did Sony's CD-based format offer game makers more creative freedom, but it came at a more affordable price. Nintendo had always charged developers excessive licensing fees for creating games on its systems, not to mention the high costs of manufacturing the cartridges.



MORE IDEAS THAN THE INNOVATIONS CATALOGUE

Memory Expansion

Although the N64 was a decent enough machine, the image quality left a lot to be desired. The video output had a lot to do with this, but the lack of internal memory meant that most games could only be displayed in low resolution. Nintendo eventually got round the problem by introducing a memory expansion pak that slotted into the port on top of the machine. Unfortunately, few games ever used it, and those that did tended to suffer from major frame-rate issues.



Red and Yellow and Green and Blue

As well as designing a truly innovative control pad, complete with an analogue control stick, Nintendo also offered N64 owners a choice of four colours. Pretty as they were, having four different coloured pads also had a practical function. Even when all the wires were tangled together, it was always clear which controller was plugged into which port simply by looking at the front of the machine.

64DD Silicon Implant

Despite all the criticism of Nintendo's decision to continue using cartridges for the N64, the company still wasn't prepared to embrace CD technology. Even so, it was well aware that cartridges were becoming less feasible as a storage medium and started experimenting with alternative technology for possible use with the N64.

What it developed was a piece of equipment called the 64-megabyte Dynamic Drive, or 64DD for short. This connected with the N64 via the extension port underneath, and used writable magnetic discs that offered developers more memory to play with. Similar in style and size to Zip disks, these also allowed gamers to save data directly to the disc itself, making the device perfectly suited to art and design software packages.

"Why I love my N64"

Nintendo did a lot wrong with the N64, but I still have a place in my heart for it. Sure, it was a pig to develop for, but those who cracked it struck gold. *Mario, Pilotwings, WaveRace, Zelda, GoldenEye, F-Zero, Rogue Squadron, Jet Force Gemini*, the pad, the Rumble Pak… reasons enough to own the machine, and reasons why it'll always be one of my favourite consoles.

Chandra Nair

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: Custom 64-bit MIPS R4300i-class RISC
CPU SPEED: 93.75MHz
CO-PROCESSOR: Custom 64-bit MIPS RISC 'Reality Immersion' RCP
CO-PROCESSOR SPEED: 62.5MHz
REALITY IMMERSION CHIP CAPABILITIES:
Built-in audio/video vector processor (RSP)
Built-in pixel drawing processor
Advanced texture-mapping
Tri-linear mip map interpolation
Perspective correction, anti-aliasing and blending transparency (up to 256 levels), gouraud shading
100 PCM sound channels
MEMORY: 4MB RAM, plus Rambus DRAM subsystem
RESOLUTION: 256x224 – 640x480
STORAGE: Cartridges: Format – 32-128 Megabits (256 possible with 4x64 meg ROMs)
INPUT/OUTPUT: Cartridge slot, four controller ports, extension port (located underneath), memory expansion port (located on the top), composite video/stereo, RF, S-Video, HDTV

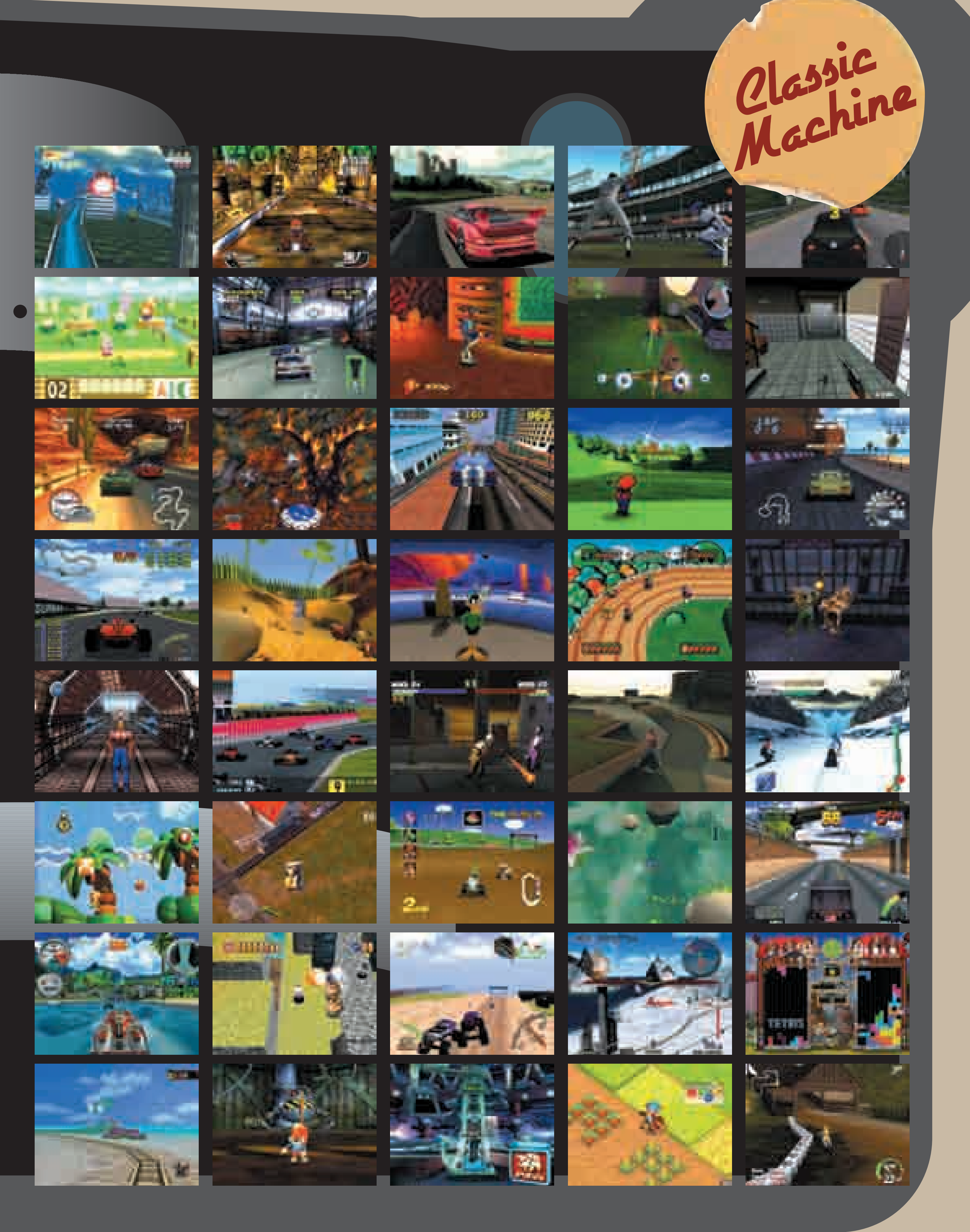
Even so, the combination of *Mario 64* and *Pilotwings 64* was more than enough to convince 300,000 Japanese gamers that the N64 was worth buying, and the initial shipment sold out in the first day. Unfortunately, only a handful of decent games were released between the launch day and Christmas '96, hinting at a problem that would plague the N64. Despite a lack of software, the success of the Japanese launch was mirrored in America that September, with *Mario* and *Pilotwings* proving popular once again.

This time a shipment of 350,000 units was sold in just a few days, with additional game titles, including *Wave Race 64, Mario Kart 64* and *Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire*, helping to boost sales over the following months.

Sadly, the European launch the following March didn't go quite as smoothly. A lack of additional control pads and memory cards had gamers frantically searching in stores with very little success, while titles such as *FIFA 64* did little to reassure the industry that the Nintendo 'Seal Of Quality' was working. Thankfully, Acclaim's *Turok Dinosaur Hunter* helped to attract older gamers who perhaps weren't interested in the cartoon colourfulness of *Mario 64*.

Nintendo




Classic Machine

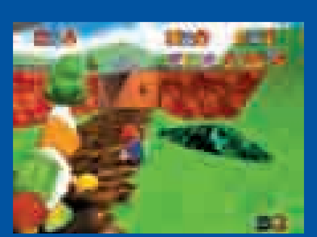
SIX OF THE BEST

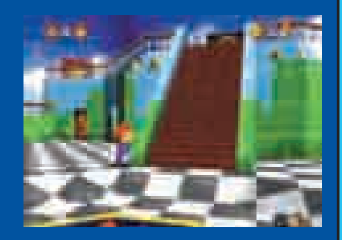
Nintendo might have been Billy-no-mates for using cartridges in the N64, but you can't deny that the machine had some great games…

SUPER MARIO 64

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Year: **1996**

Mario's transition from 2D to 3D brought about a number of necessary changes to the platform formula, the most obvious being the introduction of multiple objectives on each level. Furthermore, many other more subtle elements were also adjusted, including removing the Fireballs and making good use of the bottom bounce from *Yoshi's Island*. The game was also non-linear in structure, with each of the levels accessed through the paintings hanging on the walls of Peach's majestic castle, rather than by completing previous stages.

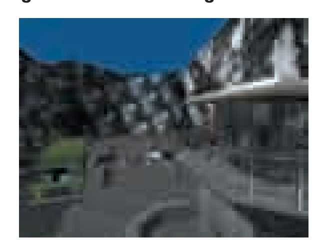


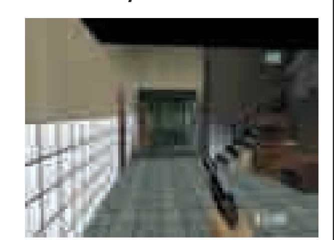


GOLDENEYE 007

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Year: **1997**

With many of Nintendo's in-house creations tending to cater for the younger end of the market, it was *GoldenEye 007* that pretty much single-handedly sold the N64 hardware to mature gamers. Demonstrating Rare's understanding of the technology on offer, *GoldenEye* flawlessly integrated the Bond movie licence with some of the most innovative and balanced first-person gameplay to date. Things have moved on since then, of course, but most similar titles have been influenced by Rare's work.

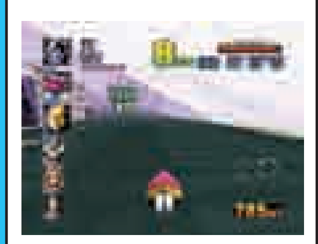




F-ZERO X

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Year: **1998**

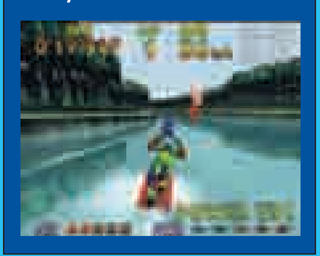
Visually more simplistic than most N64 games, *F-Zero X* offered something a little different to pretty much every other futuristic racing game available at the time. Running at an impressive 60 frames per second (one of the only N64 games to be able to boast such a thing), this 64-bit update of the classic Super Nintendo game allowed players to race against 29 CPU-controlled vehicles. The game also featured a split-screen mode for up to four players as well as a random track generator. And, of course, the franchise is still going strong.



WAVE RACE 64

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Year: **1996**

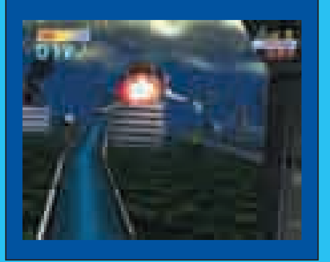
Making superb use of the N64 technology, *Wave Race 64* featured impressive real-time wave dynamics that affected the way your jet ski handled as it skimmed across them. Set across a varied selection of locations, the game successfully recreated the atmosphere of the sport, as well as bringing with it the sort of ingenuity and innovation you'd expect from a Nintendo game. What was even more impressive was that this was part of the first batch of games available for the system.



LYLAT WARS (STAR FOX 64)

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Year: **1997**

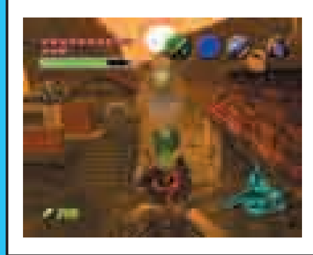
As a follow-up to the Super FX-boosted *Star Wing* on the SNES, *Lylat Wars* offered very little in the way of gameplay innovations over the original title. What it did do, however, was add style and polish to the front end, not to mention a large handful of *Star Wars* influences. Ironically, at the time that *Lylat Wars* was released, it actually did *Star Wars* better than *Star Wars* itself, though the cast of cutesy characters managed to deter almost as many gamers as it attracted. Nevertheless, this was still a great title.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OOT

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Year: **1998**

After being in development for so many years, the games industry had great expectations for the first 3D *Zelda* game. And Nintendo certainly didn't disappoint. Like *Mario 64*, *Ocarina Of Time* redefined the adventure game with many subtle innovations, the most obvious being the enemy lock-on. Until that time developers had struggled to create combat that felt accurate in 3D, but by means of a simple lock-on button Nintendo essentially brought 2D dynamics to the 3D world. And for that, we're very grateful.





Moon Patrol (Various Home Systems) Atari, 1983 – American advert

CAPCOM

Street Fighter II, Resident Evil, Devil May Cry… those people at Capcom really know what they're doing. Join us as we take a look at the company and its world-famous fighting franchise

The Early Years

It all started back in 1979, 30 May to be precise. Electronic gaming was on the verge of a revolution and in Matsubara, Osaka, a new publishing company had just opened its doors for the first time. Calling itself I.R.M. Corporation, this small business was set up with the sole purpose of distributing amusement machines, which it did until 1983 when new headquarters were established in Habikino, Osaka, and the company name changed to Capsule Computers. From then on Capcom, as it became more conveniently known, released a string of successful titles, starting with arcade games and eventually spreading to home formats.

The First Generation

If you believe all that stuff about tiny acorns and mighty oaks then it's fair to say that Capcom started out as a pretty small acorn. Interestingly, the company's first major release – a straightforward vertical shooter called *Vulgus* – was a collaboration with long-running rival development house SNK. Launching in 1984, it's not one of the company's best-known games, though similar titles released that year, such as the World War II-themed *1942*, have stood the test of time far better. Although simplistic next to many newer shoot-'em-ups, *1942* and its multiple follow-ups remain firm favourites with fans of the genre. Building on its early successes, Capcom

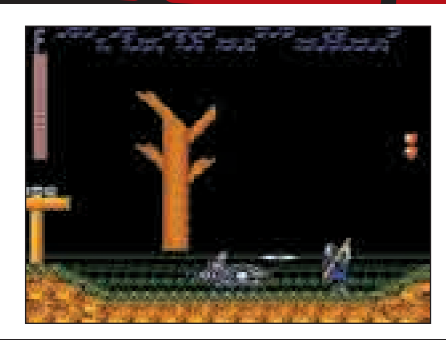
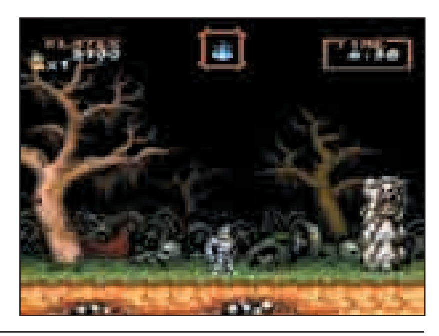




▲ The company's first major arcade release, *Vulgus*, was distributed by Capcom in Japan, and SNK in America.

▼ *Street Fighter* wasn't a huge hit, though without it it's unlikely we have got the chance to play the awesome *Street Fighter II*.



▶ *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was ported to many formats. The SNES version (right) was possibly the closest to the arcade original (left), though the Master System version (middle) was certainly a decent effort.

So Many Games, So Many Formats

WITH SO MANY VERSIONS OF CAPCOM'S GAMES AROUND, WHICH DID YOU PLAY?

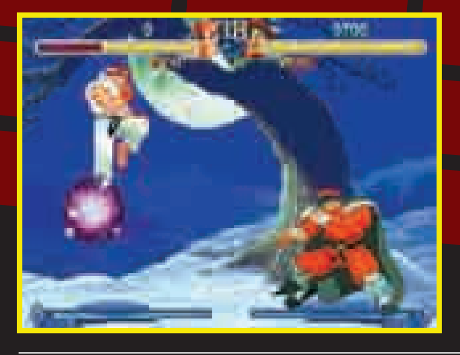
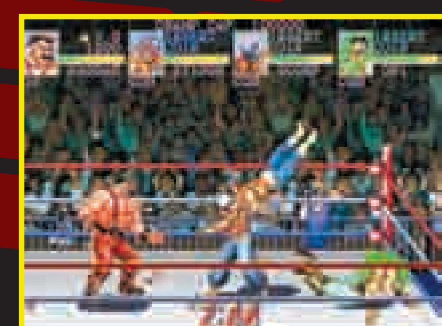
While developers today have a choice of perhaps three or four systems for which to make games, in the past there were so many formats around that it was virtually impossible for a single company to release the same game on all of them. Instead, companies like Capcom would licence their games out to third-party developers, giving them the opportunity to convert top titles to less popular systems.

The Spectrum, for example, may have been popular in the UK, but in Japan and America it was virtually unheard of. However, thanks to deals with Elite Systems and US Gold, many great Capcom games were ported to a wide range of formats, including the C64 and Amiga.

stepped up production and released over 25 arcade titles in the next three years. Again, many of the games from those early days are now all but forgotten, though one or two, particularly *Street Fighter* and *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, went on to spawn incredibly successful sequels. Arcade titles aside, it was also during this time that Capcom formed its relationship with Nintendo and began developing games for the NES. *Mega Man*, released in 1987, was one of more than a dozen NES projects, and sold so well that more than 30 sequels and spin-offs have since been developed. Amazingly, the *Mega Man* series is the company's third most successful franchise after *Resident Evil* and *Street Fighter*, with more than 18 million units shifted over the years.

The Calm Before The Storm

With the arcade industry booming and the company going from strength to strength, the remainder of the Eighties saw Capcom bolster its already impressive catalogue of titles with such gems as *The Forgotten Worlds, Final Fight, Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Strider*. It was also at this time that the CPS1 arcade board was developed, allowing Capcom's artists to draw far prettier visuals than they'd been able to before. With a Motorola 68000 microprocessor at its core, the system was tailored to Capcom's arcade needs, while featuring parallels with home consoles of the time, such as the Mega Drive. This meant that many of the company's top arcade games were ported across relatively painlessly. Aside from the titles that were appearing on Nintendo and SEGA's formats from within Capcom itself, US

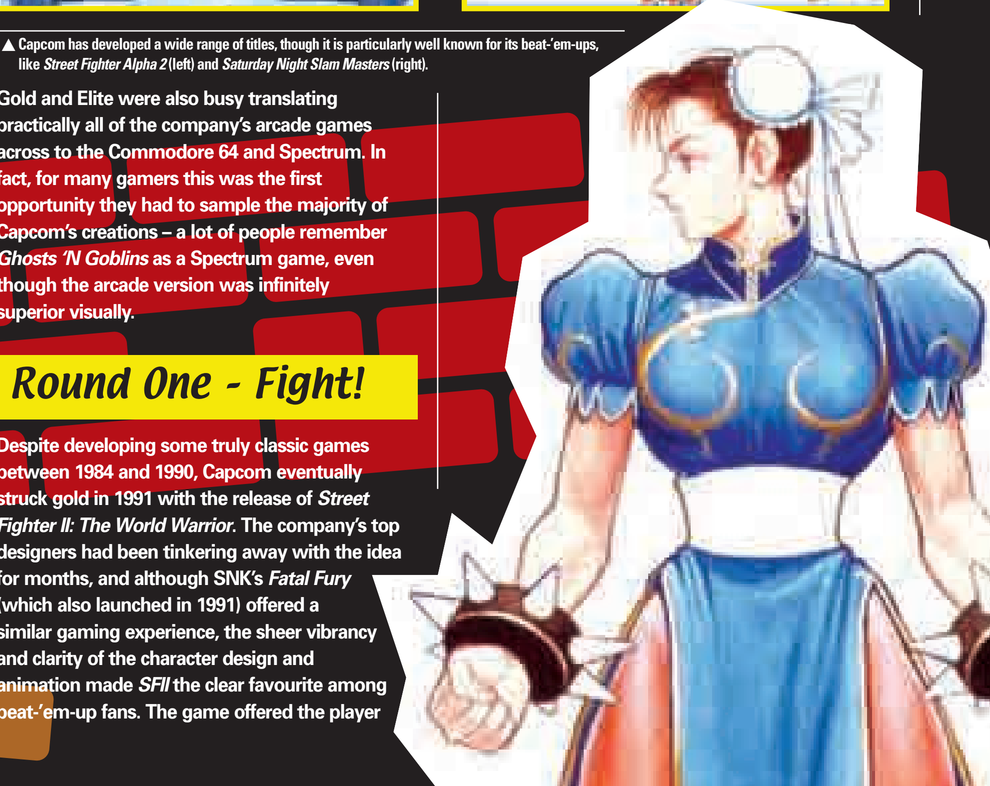



▲ Capcom has developed a wide range of titles, though it is particularly well known for its beat-'em-ups, like *Street Fighter Alpha 2* (left) and *Saturday Night Slam Masters* (right).

Gold and Elite were also busy translating practically all of the company's arcade games across to the Commodore 64 and Spectrum. In fact, for many gamers this was the first opportunity they had to sample the majority of Capcom's creations – a lot of people remember *Ghosts 'N Goblins* as a Spectrum game, even though the arcade version was infinitely superior visually.

Round One - Fight!

Despite developing some truly classic games between 1984 and 1990, Capcom eventually struck gold in 1991 with the release of *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*. The company's top designers had been tinkering away with the idea for months, and although SNK's *Fatal Fury* (which also launched in 1991) offered a similar gaming experience, the sheer vibrancy and clarity of the character design and animation made *SFII* the clear favourite among beat-'em-up fans. The game offered the player





Evolution

Street Fighter – 1987
Street Fighter 2010: The Final Fight – 1990
Street Fighter II: The World Warrior – 1991
Street Fighter II: Dash/Champion Edition – 1992
Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting – 1992
Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers – 1993
Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers – Tournament Edition – 1993
Super Street Fighter II: Turbo – 1994
Street Fighter The Movie – 1995
Street Fighter Alpha: Warriors Dreams – 1995
Street Fighter Alpha 2 – 1996
Street Fighter EX – 1996
Super Puzzle Fighter 2: Turbo – 1996
X-Men Vs. Street Fighter – 1996
Street Fighter III: New Generation – 1997
Marvel Super Heroes Vs. Street Fighter – 1997
Pocket Fighter – 1997
Street Fighter Alpha 3 – 1998
Street Fighter EX 2 – 1998
Street Fighter III: 2nd Impact – Giant Attack – 1998
Capcom Vs. SNK – 2000
Street Fighter EX 3 – 2000
Capcom Vs. SNK 2 – 2001
SNK Vs Capcom Chaos – 2003

The *Street Fighter* titles listed above (as well as numerous console-specific rehashes) have appeared on the following formats: 3DO, Amiga, Arcade (Pre-CPS, CPS1, CPSII, CPSIII), Commodore 64, Dreamcast, Game Boy, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, GameCube, Master System, Mega Drive, Neo-Geo AES, Neo-Geo MVS, Neo-Geo Pocket Color, NES, PC-Engine, PSone, PS2, Saturn, SNES, Xbox, ZX Spectrum and more…

a choice of eight characters, each with their own fighting style and list of special moves and abilities. But by far the most popular feature was the combo, which had apparently come about by complete accident during development. This basically gave skilled players the opportunity to link moves together, which looked impressive and simultaneously increased the amount of damage delivered in an unblockable string of events.

Round Two - Fight!

Even though *Street Fighter II* was undeniably popular, there were one or two slight gripes that players had, mostly regarding the power balance between the various fighters and the fact that the four boss characters weren't selectable. Of course it was inevitable that Capcom would develop a follow-up, but rather than starting from scratch on a true sequel, the company merely reworked the original game, adjusting the slight imbalances and introducing the bosses as playable characters.

Launching in April '92, *Street Fighter II: Dash*, or *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* as it's known in the UK, proved to be just as popular as its predecessor. But *Champion Edition* wasn't Capcom's only *Street Fighter* success story that year. The Super Nintendo had launched in Japan 18 months previously and although the technology lacked the graphical processing power of the CPS1 arcade board, it was more than capable of producing a worthy conversion of *SFII*. Interestingly, Capcom chose not to translate the newer *Champion Edition*, instead sticking with the standard *World Warrior* version for its initial console release. At the time there were rumours of a button-press cheat that allowed you to play as the bosses, but aside from a glitchy Game Genie code, it soon became clear that such a thing simply wasn't included. However, Super Nintendo owners would eventually get the opportunity to play as the infamous four fighters…



Round Three - Fight!

Continuing to build on the success of the first two games, Capcom released a third arcade instalment in the *SFII* series in time for Christmas 1992, then on the SNES the following summer. Again merely a tweaked version of the original game, *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* proved to be the most popular edition with the fans. With a far larger selection of special moves, faster gameplay and a fresh lick of paint, *Turbo* immediately eclipsed its predecessors. What was particularly interesting was how many of the new moves seemed to be based on those seen in bootlegged *Street Fighter* titles that had appeared in 1992, such as *Rainbow Edition* and *Black Belt*. Those of you who remember the SNES versus



▲ The *Alpha* games brought a touch of Manga style to the *Street Fighter* series, which proved popular with (most) *SFII* fans.

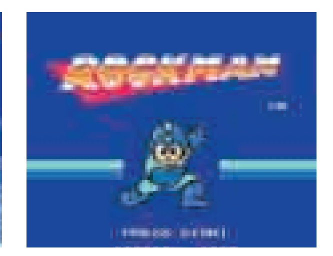
All Change

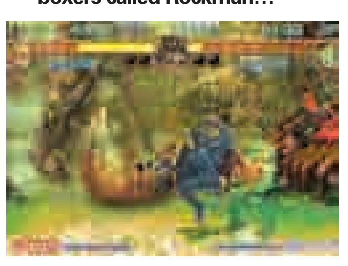
SURE, THERE ARE DIFFERENT TASTES IN JAPAN THAN THERE ARE HERE, BUT WERE ALL THESE NAME CHANGES REALLY NECESSARY? WELL, PERHAPS THEY WERE IF CAPCOM DIDN'T WANT TO GET A VISIT FROM A BOXER WITH A BONE TO PICK…

Even if you're not particularly fond of *Street Fighter II*, you may have noticed that in the Japanese version of the game some of the characters names have been switched around. In fact, these were the original names, and rumour has it that they were changed because Capcom Of America feared that a game featuring a boxer named M. Bison may create a legal dispute with the real-life boxer, Mike Tyson.

And so M. Bison became Balrog, Balrog became Vega, and Vega became M. Bison. But if such a thing is to be believed, we still have to ask why many of the characters in *DarkStalkers* also had name changes and why Rockman became Mega Man. We can't think of any boxers called Rockman…







Mega Drive era may also remember how Nintendo tried to stop *Street Fighter* from appearing on SEGA's machine by signing *Turbo: Hyper Fighting* as an exclusive title. However, Capcom got around the deal simply by calling the Mega Drive version *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition*.

Insert Coin

With *Street Fighter II Turbo* taking the original 12 fighters about as far as they could go, 1993 saw Capcom redraw many of *Street Fighter*'s character animations, increase the resolution of the game and introduce a further four characters. Running on the company's brand new CPSII board, *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers* certainly looked very nice, though there were some disappointing elements. After tweaking everything to perfection in *Turbo*, *SSFII*'s gameplay was far slower and decidedly less thrilling. The game also featured new character voices, which sounded a lot less booming than they had before. Once again, Capcom hurriedly tweaked the code, and just six months later released *Super Street Fighter II: Turbo*, complete with adjustable speed settings, grittier colours and Super Moves. At the bottom of the screen each character had a bar that gradually filled up with every move that connected and every special move performed. Once the bar was full, a brand new 'Super Move' became available – usually an extended version of one of the standard special moves. SNES and Mega Drive versions of the game were released, though, as before, Capcom went with the standard version of the game, rather than the souped-up *Turbo* version.

Here 2D, Gone Tomorrow

By mid-1994 it was clear that things were moving on – polygons were taking over and the *Street Fighter* formula was starting to look a little tired. Nevertheless, Capcom continued to produce 2D fighting games and in 1994 it introduced a new graphical style, along with the ability to block moves in the air. *DarkStalkers: The Night Warriors* featured similar dynamics to *SFII*, though the characters (all of which were witches, vampires and other such ghastly creatures), looked like the ones seen in Manga cartoons. Although it was only ever a niche title, Capcom took this new look and worked it into *Street Fighter*, resulting in *Street Fighter Alpha*. This prequel was set years before the original game and gave gamers the opportunity to play as characters only ever spoken of in SFII's background stories, such as Guile's friend Charlie.

The arcade industry was starting to show signs of collapse by 1996, and although Capcom had already made alternative plans in the form of *Resident Evil*, it wasn't ready to bury the one-on-one beat-'em-up. As well as two follow-ups to *Street Fighter Alpha*, it was also over this period that the company teamed up again with Marvel Comics, as it had when it created *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* in 1994 and *Marvel Super Heroes* in 1995. Introducing yet another twist on the *SFII* theme, *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*, *Marvel Super Heroes Vs. Street Fighter*, and many other titles in the '*Vs.*' range allowed the player to chose two fighters that could be alternated during a fight. Although SNK had developed team combat some time earlier with the *King Of Fighters* series, this was the first time that characters could be switched in real time. Thanks to the availability of a 4Mb RAM cartridge, Capcom was able to port each of these memory-intensive games to the SEGA Saturn in near perfect form, while the PlayStation conversions needed to be cut down.

As well as the continuation of the *Street Fighter Alpha* series, 1997 saw Capcom release *Street Fighter III: New Generation* on its third-generation CPS arcade board. Unfortunately, despite its stunning animation and clever parrying system, the game was poorly received, mostly due to the mixed bag of character designs and the fact that it hadn't really evolved from *SFII*. Even so, a further two *SFIII* games were developed, the third proving far more popular with hard-core fans. To date, they are the only home conversions of Capcom's *Street Fighter* series to appear on SEGA's Dreamcast – the perfect final resting place for the *Street Fighter* series, without a doubt.

Continue?

Although many of Capcom's products now revolve around *Resident Evil* and the survival horror genre, the company continues to embrace its past, even though most of its retro titles are so niche market that it barely seems worth developing them. In recent years we've seen the company release a handful of *Mega Man* titles, as well as teaming up with SNK once more to produce *Capcom Vs. SNK 2* and the upcoming *SNK Vs. Capcom Chaos*. Sadly, though also rather predictably, most of these titles have only sparked the interest of the hardest of hard-core gamers. Capcom continues to develop some of the better games on the market, though it's sad to see the ones we've loved fade into the mists of time.

Step-by-Step

HEAD OVER HEELS

Remember those classic titles that were so difficult you might not have seen the later stages? Then that's where our monthly step-by-step guide comes in handy…

H*ead Over Heels* is rightly hailed as one of the best 3D isometric adventures of all time. And also one of the most difficult and frustrating. Set over numerous planets, your first small challenge was to get Head and Heels to meet up at the Market Place so they could join forces. Of course, it wasn't exactly easy and got a whole lot tougher once you actually succeeded in getting them both there. For now though, join us as Head is put to the test…

Jump up against the left-hand side of fence until you reveal a gap, avoid the propeller and grab all those goodies.

Nice and simple this room. Simply jump onto the lift, push all the tiles onto the escalator, then push the tower towards the exit. Then all you have to do is get back onto the lift and jump across to the exit.

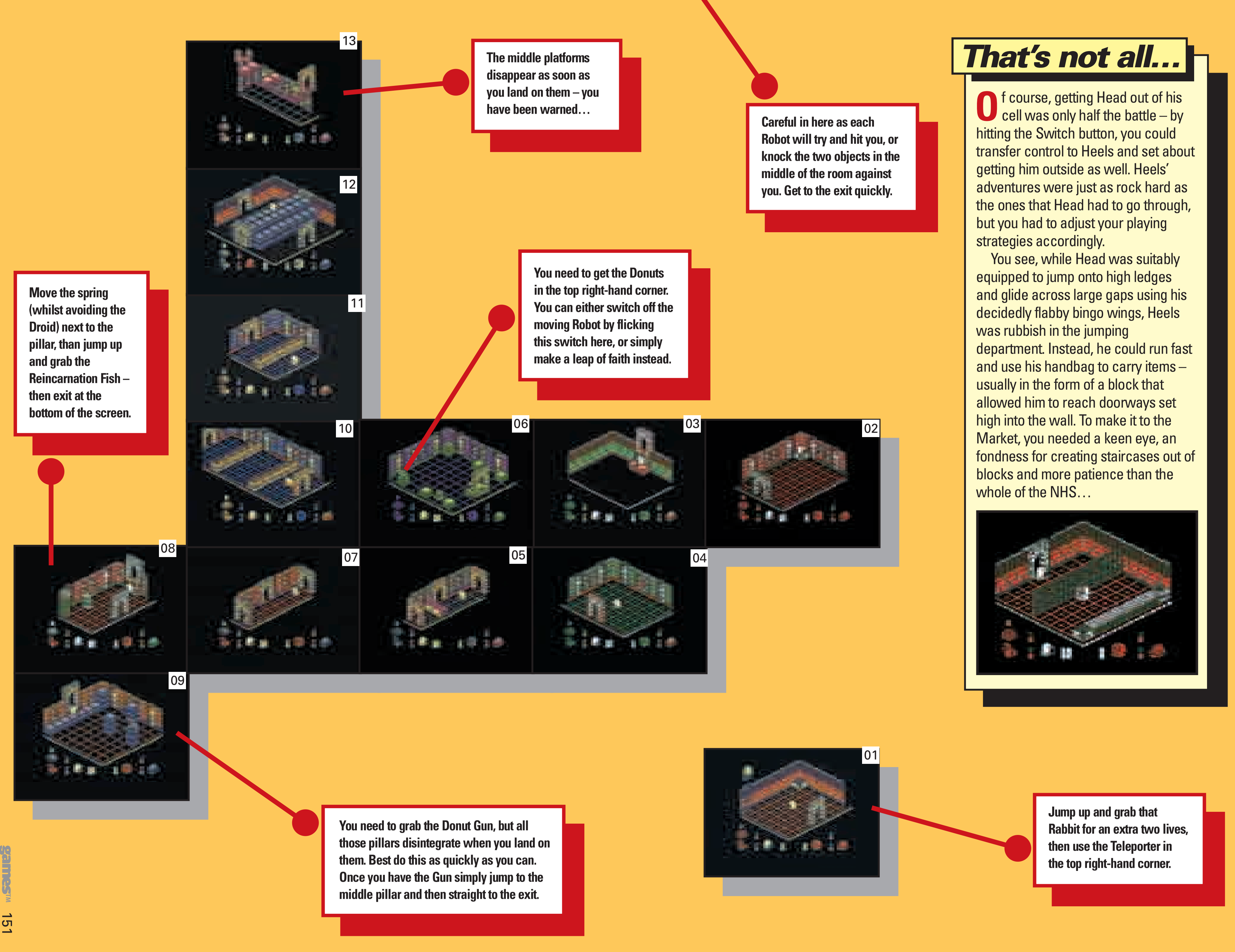
You can pick up the Reincarnation Fish, but once again you need to be aware of the disappearing platforms. Grab the Fish, make your way out of the room and you're nearly there.

Succes – Head's first mission is complete. Now it's time for Heels' turn…

This is one of two routes you can take. Jump onto the two Books in the middle of the room then push the third Book onto the Robot's head. Push it as far as you can without it dropping to the floor, then jump for that exit.

There's a Rabbit here if you need extra lives, careful though – as it requires pixel-perfect jumping

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26



That's not all…

Of course, getting Head out of his cell was only half the battle – by hitting the Switch button, you could transfer control to Heels and set about getting him outside as well. Heels' adventures were just as rock hard as the ones that Head had to go through, but you had to adjust your playing strategies accordingly.

You see, while Head was suitably equipped to jump onto high ledges and glide across large gaps using his decidedly flabby bingo wings, Heels was rubbish in the jumping department. Instead, he could run fast and use his handbag to carry items – usually in the form of a block that allowed him to reach doorways set high into the wall. To make it to the Market, you needed a keen eye, an fondness for creating staircases out of blocks and more patience than the whole of the NHS…

FOOTBALL FAMILY TREE

Ever since the concept of two sticks deflecting a square dot around the screen so admirably managed to recreate all the thrills of tennis, developers have seized upon the challenge of recreating our national sport to similar effect. Over the years many have tried, and almost as many have failed, but a trail of gems has been left behind en route to eventually achieving the sublime gameplay Konami's Pro Evolution series showcases today.

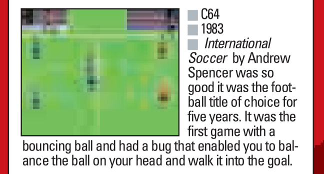
SOCCER

- Arcade
- 1973
- Taito's *Soccer* was one of several arcade titles to take the popular *Pong* concept and simply introduce a set of goalposts at either end of the screen. There was little advance on this makeshift paddle-based model as the decade wore on.

SOCCER

- Intellivision
- 1980
- Finally trading paddles for stickmen, this was really where the genre began to take shape. Of the earliest console football titles, *Soccer* was arguably the best looking and contained several features that made it into many later games.

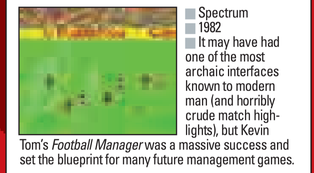
INTERNATIONAL SOCCER



- C64
- 1983
- *International Soccer* by Andrew Spencer was so good it was the football title of choice for five years. It was the first game with a bouncing ball and had a bug that enabled you to balance the ball on your head and walk it into the goal.

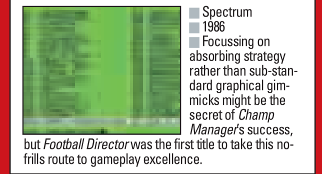
MANAGEMENT

FOOTBALL MANAGER



- Spectrum
- 1982
- It may have had one of the most archaic interfaces known to modern man (and horribly crude match highlights), but Kevin Tom's *Football Manager* was a massive success and set the blueprint for many future management games.

FOOTBALL DIRECTOR



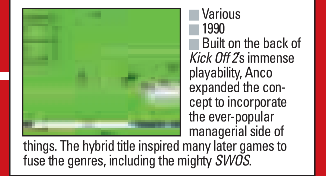
- Spectrum
- 1986
- Focussing on absorbing strategy rather than sub-standard graphical gimmicks might be the secret of *Champ Manager*'s success, but *Football Director* was the first title to take this no-frills route to gameplay excellence.

TRACKSUIT MANAGER



- Various
- 1988
- With the *Football Manager* series still ruling the roost, *Tracksuit Manager* gave it a very rude wake-up call. Using an excellent interface and superb scrolling match commentary, this was pure manna from football management heaven.

PLAYER MANAGER



- Various
- 1990
- Built on the back of *Kick Off 2*'s immense playability, Anco expanded the concept to incorporate the ever-popular managerial side of things. The hybrid title inspired many later games to fuse the genres, including the mighty *SWOS*.

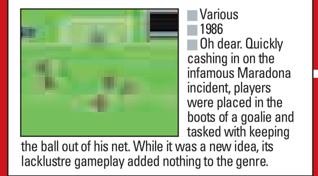
MATCH DAY



- Spectrum
- 1985
- Jon Ritman's *Match Day* was a massive success upon its release and went straight to the top of the charts, where it stayed for two months. It featured intelligent players and was the first football game to feature a power bar.

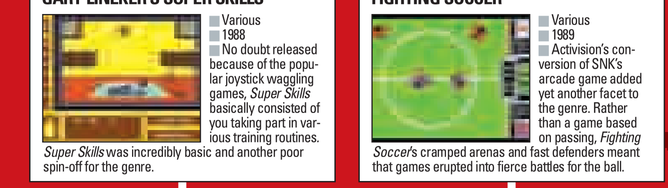
MINI-GAMES

PETER SHILTON'S HANDBALL MARADONA



- Various
- 1986
- Oh dear. Quickly cashing in on the infamous Maradona incident, players were placed in the boots of a goalie and tasked with keeping the ball out of his net. While it was a new idea, its lacklustre gameplay added nothing to the genre.

GARY LINEKER'S SUPER SKILLS



- Various
- 1988
- No doubt released because of the popular joystick waggling games, *Super Skills* basically consisted of you taking part in various training routines. *Super Skills* was incredibly basic and another poor spin-off for the genre.

VIOLENCE

FIGHTING SOCCER

- Various
- 1989
- Activision's conversion of SNK's arcade game added yet another facet to the genre. Rather than a game based on passing, *Fighting Soccer*'s cramped arenas and fast defenders meant that games erupted into fierce battles for the ball.

MATCH DAY 2

- Various
- 1988
- Ritman returned with a superb follow-up to the excellent *Match Day*. New features included the diamond deflection system, barging and the excellent Kickometer. Unfortunately, *Match Day 3* (an arcade game for Rare) never appeared.

LICENSED

EMLYN HUGHES' INTERNATIONAL SOCCER



- Commodore 64
- 1988
- Now this was how to use a licence. Basically an update of Spencer's *International Soccer*, *Emlyn Hughes* added sliding tackles, long and short passes and additional frames of animation to create a fantastic football experience.

TOP-DOWN

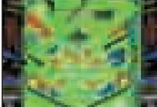
MICROPROSE SOCCER

- Various
- 1989
- *Microprose Soccer*'s top-down view marked a massive change for the genre and also included yet another new feature – the outrageous banana shot. The game also featured action replays, fouls and variable weather conditions.

KICK OFF

- Various
- 1989
- The arrival of the 16-bit computers gave football games a new lease of life. Dino Dini's *Kick Off* featured enhanced visuals and silky-smooth scrolling. The fantastic sequel followed soon after, introducing real teams and players.

SOCCER PINBALL



- Various
- 1992
- Not as bizarre a combination as it might first sound. Using a traditional football field as the table's backdrop, *Soccer Pinball* proved to be a fun and challenging pinball game. It's a very tenuous link, though, and one for fans only.

SOCCER BRAWL



- Arcade
- 1991
- SNK's *Soccer Brawl* was a massive improvement over *Fighting Soccer* and gave players a selection of devastating manoeuvres to help them win the ball from the opposition. Incredibly fast and slick to play, it's still enjoyable today.

STRIKER

- SNES
- 1993
- One of the first games available for the SNES, *Striker* built heavily on the rather primitive Amiga version and offered both traditional and five-a-side matches. Eventually losing its crown to *ISS*, *Striker* was an incredibly satisfying game.

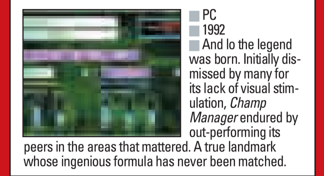
FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

- Mega Drive
- 1994
- Once upon a time the *FIFA* series actually meant something. With its isometric viewpoint, superb presentation and passable gameplay, this was one of the Mega Drive's best football titles. Sadly, the years have not been kind…

SENSIBLE SOCCER

- Various
- 1992
- Arguably the most playable football title of the entire decade, *Sensible Soccer* used the same top-down perspective popularised by the *Kick Off* series to produce a footballing legend that has aged in the visual department only.

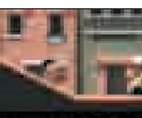
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER



- PC
- 1992
- And lo the legend was born. Initially dismissed by many for its lack of visual stimulation, *Champ Manager* endured by out-performing its peers in the areas that mattered. A true landmark whose ingenious formula has never been matched.

ARCADE

SOCCER KID



- Various
- 1994
- When an evil alien makes off with a soccer cup, only Soccer Kid is able to retrieve it. Using his nifty ball skills, our hero must battle his way through this cheerful platform adventure. Surprisingly, it wasn't as bad as it sounds…

VIRTUA STRIKER

- Arcade
- 1994
- While SEGA has created some fantastic *Virtua* games, the *Virtua Striker* series failed to live up to its peers. Despite releasing a total of three games, none of them managed to achieve the gameplay quality for which SEGA is renowned.

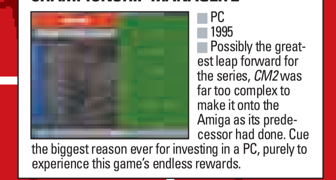
INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER

- SNES
- 1994
- Konami's debut performance might not quite have mirrored its world-beating form of late, but signs of great potential were already shining through. In Japan, *Perfect 11* similarly laid the foundations of the *Winning Eleven* series.

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER

- Amiga
- 1993
- Taking *Sensible Soccer*'s sublime gameplay to new heights, *SWOS* introduced an intensive managerial element and featured an incredible collection of worldwide leagues. Many still hail *SWOS* as the greatest football title ever made.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2



- PC
- 1995
- Possibly the greatest leap forward for the series, *CM2* was far too complex to make it onto the Amiga as its predecessor had done. Cue the biggest reason ever for investing in a PC, purely to experience this game's endless rewards.

WORLD PK SOCCER

- Arcade
- 1994
- During the heyday of arm-wrestling machines and quirky arcade peripherals, Jaleco's penalty-kick simulator slotted in nicely. For a small fee you could experience the shame of missing a penalty in front of your on-looking mates.

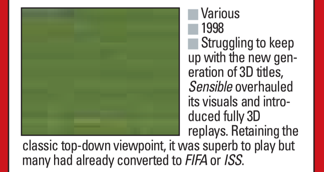
ACTUA SOCCER

- Various
- 1995
- The introduction of a 3D perspective sadly put an end to the top-down titles' dominance of the early Nineties, and Gremlin's *Actua Soccer* was among the big titles to take advantage of the technology that was revolutionising the genre.

FIFA FOOTBALL 96

- Various
- 1995
- As the novelty of *FIFA*'s visuals wore off, the fickle gameplay had begun to stick out like the sore thumbs we had from playing too much *Sensible Soccer*. However, an impressive transition to 3D gave the series a whole new lease of life.

SENSIBLE SOCCER 98



- Various
- 1998
- Struggling to keep up with the new generation of 3D titles, *Sensible* overhauled its visuals and introduced fully 3D replays. Retaining the classic top-down viewpoint, it was superb to play but many had already converted to *FIFA* or *ISS*.

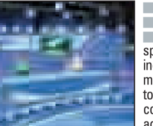
ISS 64

- N64
- 1997
- With its flurry of yearly incarnations, *FIFA* had started to pull away from the chasing pack as the title of choice for football fans. Yet *ISS 64* began to see Konami's series emerging as a serious alternative to EA's bestseller.

THIS IS FOOTBALL

- PSone
- 1999
- The PSone was never short of botched attempts to rival *FIFA*, but Sony's *TIF* publicly promised to bring a new level of playability to the genre. Sadly, the game's failure to deliver ensured it never caused the upset many had touted.

LMA MANAGER



- PSone
- 1999
- *LMA Manager* sported such appealing match visuals that many were tempted to give the idea of a console-based management sim one last chance. Despite the eye-candy, however, the strategic side proved to be as shallow as ever.

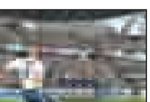
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 3

- PC
- 1999
- After a couple of seasonal updates, *Champ Manager* fans were finally treated to another full sequel that overhauled the interface and introduced more realism than ever. Another three updates followed before *CM4* made its bow.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER

- PS2
- 2001
- The series came a long way during its days on the PSone, and *Pro Evo*'s debut on the PS2 was widely acclaimed as the world's premier football sim. It still lacked official licensing, but completely eclipsed the competition in terms of gameplay.

DAVID BECKHAM SOCCER



- Various
- 2001
- Rage snapped up the lucrative Beckham licence in the hope of recreating the success it had with *Striker*. First appearing on PSone and GBA, then later PS2 and Xbox, the game was promptly swatted aside by *FIFA* and *Pro Evolution*.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

- PS2
- 2003
- The series' third instalment on the PS2 enhances the unrivalled gameplay even further to produce the most realistic, fluid and downright playable simulation of football ever made. Closest rival *FIFA* fell off the pace long ago.

ISS 3

- Various
- 2003
- While the *Pro Evolution* series took precision gameplay to new heights, Konami sent the original *ISS* franchise on a more arcade-style route. *ISS 3* showcased slightly better visuals than *Pro Evo*, but distinctly lacked finesse on the pitch.

CLUB FOOTBALL

- Various
- 2003
- This year's main challenge to Konami and EA's footballing giants came in the form of Codemasters' *Club Football*. Despite offering 17 club-specific versions and great visuals, the match action itself was actually less fluid than *FIFA*.

FIFA FOOTBALL 2004

- Various
- 2003
- Right on schedule, EA's annual upgrade to the *FIFA* series is once again on the shelves in time for Christmas. Despite offering a plethora of alluring features, the all-important gameplay action once again comes a poor second best to *Pro Evo*.

TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004

- Various
- 2003
- With the *FIFA* engine powering its match visuals, EA's *TCM 2003* enjoyed reasonable success on the PC. The latest version makes its debut on PS2 and Xbox, and allows players to import their carefully sculpted team into *FIFA 2004*.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

- PC
- 2003
- Pockets of hard-core fans were up in arms when *CM4* meddled with the age-old formula and introduced a 2D match engine, yet most of us rejoiced to see our tactics being played out before our eyes without any forfeiture of realism.

TREASURE HUNTER

So you think you're a hard-core gamer? Well, when was the last time you found any bargains like these...?

If you're really into games there's nothing more enjoyable than pottering around second-hand shops, or clicking your way around the internet looking for bargain titles. Of course, most games depreciate in value as time goes by, though the odd one or two go on to become highly collectable. This month we've been out and about to see what retro bargains we can find at some of our favourite haunts.



SAMURAI SHODOWN II

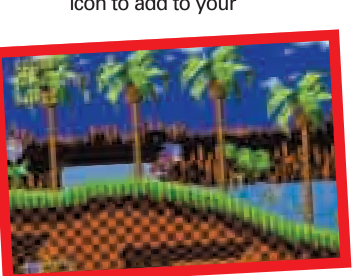
Format: Neo-Geo AES
Price Paid: £20
Potential Profit: £15
Found at: CeX

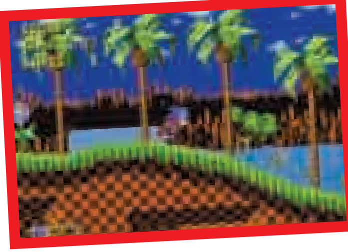
Right now it's not all that difficult to pick up decent Neo-Geo AES cartridges for reasonable prices, but £20 for a copy of *Samurai Shodown II* seemed especially good value. Similarly priced AES games can be found on eBay, though rarely titles as sophisticated as this classic beat-'em-up from SNK. Featuring solid gameplay, plenty of characters and truly lush graphics, the only downside is that you'll need to shell out as much as £225 for a console to play it on.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Format: Mega Drive
Price: 20p
Potential Profit: £1.30
Found at: Game Station

Sure, it's hardly a rare title, but for just 20p we bought ourselves a slice of console gaming history. Perfect as a Christmas present for a young family member, or simply as an icon to add to your collection, no gamer should really be without a copy of SEGA's classic game. Why buy *Sonic Mega Collection* for £40 on GameCube when you can get all the original games on cartridge, along with a Mega Drive to play them on, for roughly half the price? Saying that, it wouldn't cost a whole lot more for a GameCube these days.

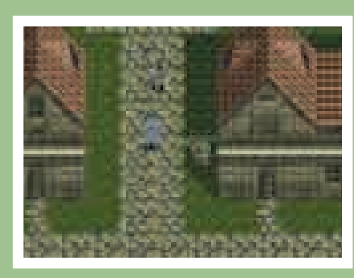




PHANTASY STAR III

Format: Mega Drive
Price Paid: £4
Potential Profit: £36
Found at: Game Station

We have to admit that we're not particularly fond of SEGA's *Phantasy Star* series, but at £4 *Phantasy Star III* was a real bargain. While lacking much of the creative ingenuity of Squaresoft's SNES games, *Phantasy Star* certainly had its fair share of fans, especially in Japan where RPGs were generally more popular than anywhere else during the 16-bit era. After picking the game up at such an affordable price, we managed to find copies selling at ten times that amount. So, £36 profit – not bad for a morning's work.





SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Format: Saturn
Price Paid: 25p
Potential Profit: £1.75
Found at: Game Station

Although it's hardly ever going to become a collector's item, *SEGA Rally* for 25p was a bargain we simply couldn't turn down. As one of the best racing games ever created, as well as one of the most impressive pieces of Saturn programming, *SEGA Rally* was the perfect blend of arcade accessibility and realism. It may seem dated now with only three cars and four tracks, but you'd be hard-pushed to find another rally game that's as fun to play. At 25p there's the opportunity for a small but significant profit.

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

TAKE THE BULLET

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…



Some games come out in Japan but never get converted to English, while others are released in arcades, but never get translated to home consoles. And others, like Red Lemon's Take The Bullet, never even make it out of production…



▲ It could have been great – multiplayer online shooting action. Maybe it was never meant to be.

Title: **Take The Bullet**
Developer: **Red Lemon Studios**
Format: **SEGA Dreamcast**
Release date: **N/A**

Though many Dreamcast games were cancelled due to poor hardware sales, one of the most promising projects that never saw the light of day was *Take The Bullet* from Scotland-based Red Lemon Studios. With a visual style reminiscent of Rare's *GoldenEye 007* on the N64, the game was set in the late Sixties and followed the adventures of a bodyguard whose main objective was to protect a presidential candidate from gang known as the Children Of Gabrielle.

Seeing as there were so few titles like it in development for the Dreamcast, it wasn't really surprising that SEGA Europe pinned so many hopes on this elusive game. The developer was planning to include 12 levels, 18 weapons and the option to play from a first- or third-person point of view, which sounded decent enough. But aside from the core structure of the game, it was how the creators hoped to use the Dreamcast lightgun that impressed many.

The idea was that the player would use the built-in D-pad to control movement, while aiming at the bad guys in the style of *Virtua Cop*. A brave idea, certainly, and one that we're surprised hasn't been picked up and used by other developers. But by far the most exciting feature was the lengthy list of multiplayer options, truly helping to set this apart from the competition. As well as a four-player split-screen mode, Red Lemon also promised online play for up to 16 players – no doubt a daunting task for the programmers, especially considering that SEGA's network plans were so far behind schedule.

Unfortunately, only a handful of screenshots were unveiled before the game disappeared completely, never to be shown again. Although never officially canned (there are probably SEGA representatives out there who insist the game is still on the way), it's fairly obvious that the *Take The Bullet* project has indeed taken the bullet seeing as how Red Lemon Studios was declared bankrupt earlier this year. And so this early image (above), lovely as it is, is all we have to remember what could easily have been the Dreamcast's finest moment.

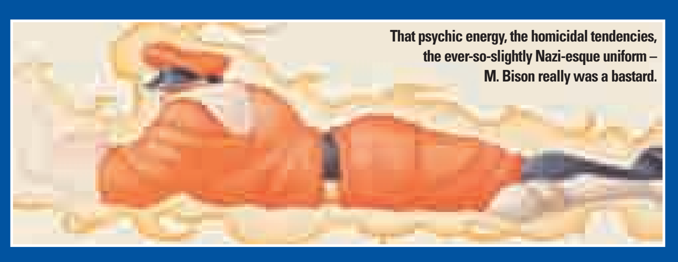
GREAT GAME BOSSES



M. BISON – STREET FIGHTER II







That psychic energy, the homicidal tendencies, the ever-so-slightly Nazi-esque uniform – M. Bison really was a bastard.

While many will no doubt argue that Akuma is the definitive bad guy at the heart of *Street Fighter II,* he really isn't a patch on M. Bison.

As the original boss character, Bison was responsible for the death of Chun Li's father, the slaughter of Guile's best friend, Charlie, and for wrecking numerous other characters' lives. Could Akuma boast such an unprecedented rule of evil? Not a chance.

The fact of the matter is that Bison had just the right amount of evil about him. As leader of a criminal organisation known as Shadoloo, the man's lust for power saw him travelling around the world, eventually settling in Thailand where he put his master plan into effect.

Naturally, his scheme was to take over the world, and with psychic energy radiating from his body and piercing eyes sunk deep into his head, this nasty dictator certainly had as good a chance as any.

Of course, underneath it all he was just an ordinary man, and that was what made Bison more interesting than his peers. Akuma was simply two-dimensional evil, while Sagat, Vega and Balrog were just Bison wannabes. And the less said about Urien from *Street Fighter III* the better…



C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- NAME: Nintendo 64
- PRICE: £20-25
- THREE OF THE BEST:
  Perfect Dark (est. price £18)
  Banjo-Kazooie (est. price £14)
  1080° Snowboarding (est. price £8)
- For less than £50 you can get yourself an N64 with around half a dozen of the best games ever created. Not bad at all.

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SELLING

To sell items on GTM, simply list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on GTM, along with your region in the UK.

BUYING

To buy an item from GTM, all you have to do is list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

WANTED

If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs on a first come, first served basis

GTM RULES AND SMALL PRINT

This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. GTM is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Highbury - Paragon cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

BUY & SELL your retro games with games™

G.T.M.

GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.



FOR SALE

Lot 29 – *Moonwalker* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 30 – *Rock 'N Roll Racing* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 31 – Neo-Geo Pocket Color and six games including *Metal Slug* and *Sonic*. Boxed as new. £80. Warwickshire

Lot 32 – *Arcade* games mags. All 12 issues. £20. Warwickshire

Lot 33 – *Get Bass* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with fishing rod in mint condition. £40

Lot 34 – *House Of The Dead 2* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with gun in mint condition. £35

Lot 35 – *Seaman* for SEGA Dreamcast, USA version. Boxed with mic in mint condition. £30

Lot 36 – *The King Of Fighters '99 Dream Match*, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20

Lot 37 – *Capcom Vs. SNK* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20

Lot 38 – *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* for Neo-Geo AES, Japanese version. Boxed in very good condition. £260. Sussex



Lot 39 – *Terranigma* for Super Nintendo, PAL version. Boxed in very good condition. £80. Sussex

Lot 40 – *Elite Plus* for Amiga, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £2 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 41 – *Rocket Ranger* for Amiga, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 42 – Game Boy Color plus *Metal Gear Solid*, *Tennis* and printer. All unboxed. £25 (or near offer). Fife

Lot 43 – Neo-Geo Pocket Color (clear vinyl) including *Sonic* and *Pac-Man*. Boxed as new. £80. Barnes

Lot 44 – Nintendo 64 (turquoise clear vinyl) plus two controllers and *Mario 64*. Boxed as new. £60. Barnes

Lot 45 – *Metal Gear: Snake's Revenge* for NES. Boxed with slipcase, but no instructions available. Very good condition. £10 plus p+p (or near offer). West Mids

WANTED

WANTED 13 – *Vandal Hearts* for Sony PlayStation. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 14 – *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for Saturn. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 15 – *Panzer Dragoon Mini* for SEGA Game Gear. Must have box and instructions. Poole

WANTED 18 – *Chrono Trigger* for Super Nintendo. Preferably with box and instructions. Will pay up to £70. Londonderry, NI

WANTED 19 – WonderSwan dating games. Must be in good condition with boxes and instructions. Surrey

WANTED 20 – *King Of Fighters '95* (Jap or USA version) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be boxed with manual. Derbyshire

WANTED 21 – *Star Ocean: The Second Story* for PSone. Must be in good condition, preferably with box and instructions. Forfar.

WANTED 22 – PC engine NEC FX console or **Super Grafx console.** Must be in good condition. Will pay £80. Barnes

WANTED 23 – *King Of Fighters 2001* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes

WANTED 24 – *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes

WANTED 25 – *Ikaruga* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes

WANTED 26 – *The Secret Of Mana* for Super Nintendo. Any condition accepted, providing the game works. Manchester.

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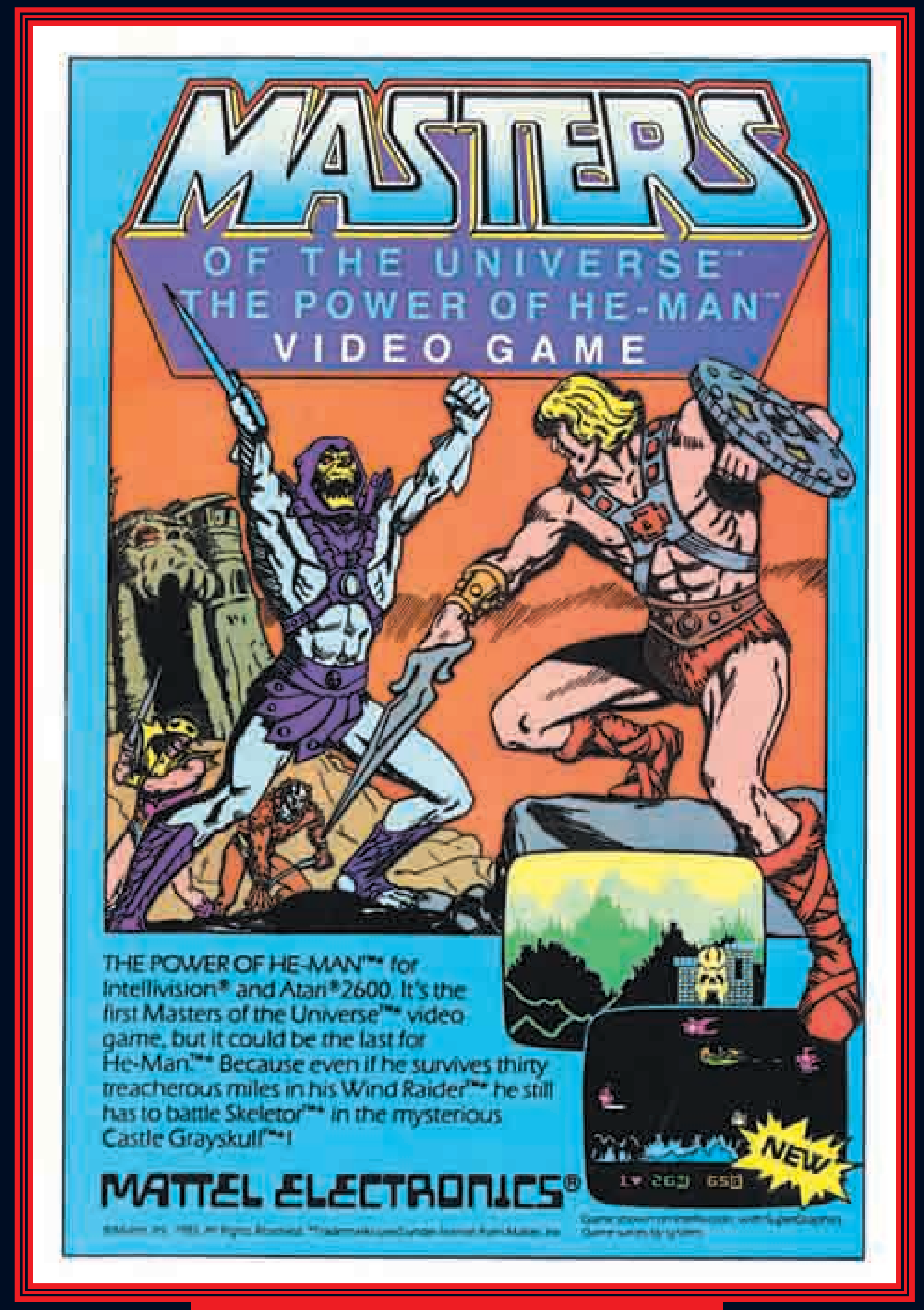
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Write your advertisement here, one word per box, and only include your name, address, phone number and/or email address below if you want them printed



Masters Of The Universe (Various Home Systems) Mattel, 1983 – American advert


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£139.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

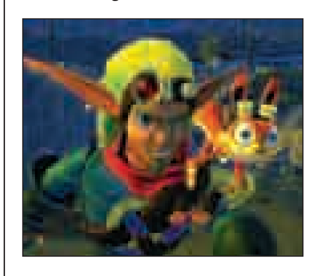




TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Dark Chronicle IMPORT	Sony	In-House
8	Rez	SEGA	UGA
9	Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix
10	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
11	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House
12	Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House
13	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive
14	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
15	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House
16	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
17	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
18	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
19	XGRA	Acclaim	In-House
20	Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	SEGA	AM2

VIEWPOINT
JAK II: RENEGADE
Jak's return might have surprised some people who thought his wholesome image might carry through to the sequel, but that doesn't make it any less worth consideration – especially if you're in the market for an action/adventure game with a difference.



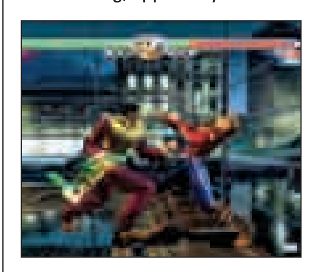
VIEWPOINT
HARDWARE
Turn your PS2 on, switch your brain off and enjoy *Hardware* – if you've managed to get your console online, that is. It's a good laugh with mates across the Net, but you'll never get the most out of it if you don't pick yourself up a network adapter.

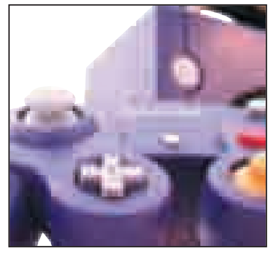


VIEWPOINT
SUIKODEN III
Now that *Final Fantasy X-2* has finally been granted a European release, the lucky importers amongst you have had less to rave about. So we thought we'd remind you that Konami's classic RPG still isn't coming out over here. Just so you know…



VIEWPOINT
VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 EVOLUTION
Following our review of *Soul Calibur II* a few months back (which some of you have branded as rather harsh), we thought you should know that we're more fond of SEGA's effort than Namco's. It's a taste thing, apparently.






GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. Admittedly, third-party support is rapidly dwindling, but you only have to look at the first-party releases to appreciate the quality gaming on offer. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games you'll ever play and missing out on them isn't an option.



TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House
2	The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House
3	F-Zero GX IMPORT	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
4	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution IMPORT	Konami	In-House
5	Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
7	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	In-House
8	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
9	Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House
10	Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House
11	Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
13	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot
14	Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House
15	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House
16	Mario Party 4	Nintendo	Hudson
17	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House
18	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	SEGA	Overworks
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5
20	Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House

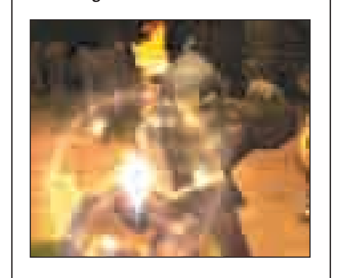
VIEWPOINT
VIEWTIFUL JOE

Yes, so it's possibly one of the hardest and most unfair games out for the GameCube, but that doesn't mean we like it any less. And now that you too can finally feel our pain, it might make you understand exactly what we've been going through.



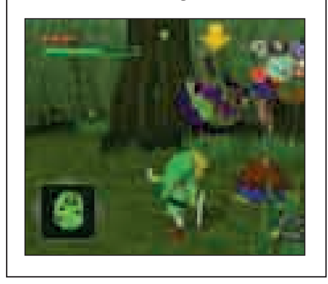
VIEWPOINT
FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

Still being played to death here in the **games™** office and still not being understood in the slightest, Square Enix's first GameCube RPG is a game that brings the whole team together… for bouts of shouting and abuse. Bah.



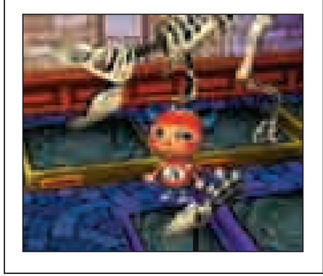
VIEWPOIN
LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

Having recently discovered that our memory card decided to wipe itself (damn you, technology), we've had to return to Link's latest adventure for one more try. Believe us, we'll get all of those Models soon enough.



VIEWPOINT
ANIMAL CROSSING

As you've no doubt heard by now, *Animal Crossing* is finally coming out on the PAL format… in Australia. Boo, Nintendo. If there was ever a better time to look into buying games from abroad, it'd be now – at least until Nintendo Europe gets its arse into gear.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

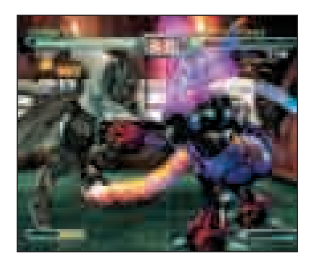
Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.



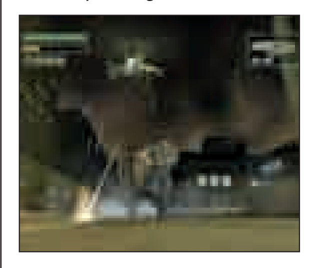
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	In-House
6	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare
7	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
8	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
9	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
10	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios
11	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
13	XGRA	Acclaim	In-House
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
16	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
17	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive
18	Colin McRae Rally 04	CodeMasters	In-House
19	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games
20	Tiger Woods 2004	Electronic Arts	In-House

VIEWPOINT
BLOODY ROAR EXTREME
'Average' might be a word that gets bandied around a lot here at **games™**, but 'average' doesn't mean a game can't be quite fun too. Hence *Bloody Roar Extreme* – generic to the max and hardly inspired, but still a laugh with friends on the odd occasion.



VIEWPOINT
FREEDOM FIGHTERS
Hold the front page – Electronic Arts in non-sports game release shocker. Thanks to the folks at Io Interactive that's exactly what's happened and, hopefully, *Freedom Fighters* will make it into the top of the chart where it so definitely belongs.

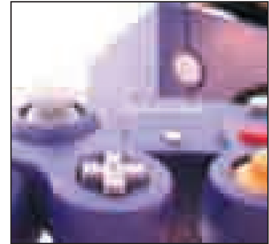


VIEWPOINT
THE SIMPSONS: HIT AND RUN
What's this? A decent *Simpsons* game? It surprised us too. But while it's not exactly going to beat *GTA* into the ground any time soon, it's still good enough for the fans of the show (and any people who can't stand violence).



VIEWPOINT
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04
Okay, so maybe it wasn't quite the evolution that we were hoping for, but nevertheless *Colin Mcrae Rally 04* is still probably the best rally racing game around. Of course, we say 'probably' because we know the next one's bound to be even better.






GBA

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£79.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available now.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	In-House
2	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square-Enix
3	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
4	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
5	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
6	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
7	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
8	Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
9	Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish

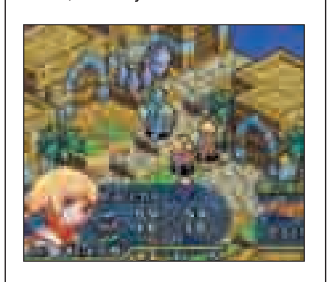
VIEWPOINT
BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

Far too gimmicky for words, but a very absorbing adventure game nonetheless. Kojima-san has hit the mark once again for Konami.



VIEWPOINT
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

Damn you, Nintendo – it's *Advance Wars* syndrome all over again. It might not look like everyone's cup of tea, but it's just so addictive…



PC

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable



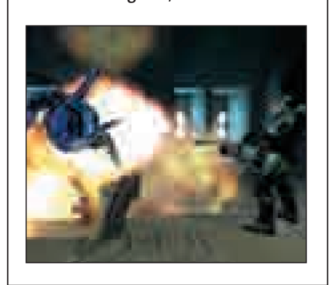
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
2	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Sports Interactive
3	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
4	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
5	Freelancer	Microsoft	Digital Anvil
6	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Tron 2.0	Disney	Monolith
9	Age Of Mythology	Microsoft	Ensemble Studios
10	Day Of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software

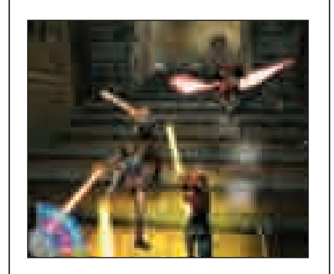
VIEWPOINT
HALO

The game that made the Xbox is finally available for the PC, complete with online play. Don't you think it's about time you went out and bought it, eh?



VIEWPOINT
JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

Another month, another *Star Wars* game for the PC – but this time, it's actually quite good. Well worth a look if you're into it.





180
PAGES OF L.A. COP-BUSTING EXCITEMENT

REVIEWED

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.

Can Activision really do the impossible and take over Rockstar's turf? Find out when we bring you our definitive review next month

ON SALE 03 DEC



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

And still they come – *Gran Turismo 4*, *Final Fantasy*, *Pikmin 2* and *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos* are just some of the games to look forward to very soon

MORE… REVIEWS

The last of the Christmas line-up lands on our desks – *Max Payne 2*, *Manhunt*, *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, *Legacy Of Kain* and a whole lot more besides…

MORE… FEATURES

games™ goes behind closed doors to meet the industry veterans at Team 17, talks broadband with the heads of BT and takes a long, hard look at the hidden world of import gaming

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

LIKE STICKY PHLEGM, THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT YOU SIMPLY HAVE TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST, AND THESE ARE THE PAGES WHERE YOU COUGH YOURSELF SILLY

Pirates, retro games being (surprise, surprise) better than today's releases, films of games… all this and a dig at PC gamers – you just gotta love 'em…



MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™
Highbury - Paragon
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the Net browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the 'forum' icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

Step Three:
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**drunkard**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

I WAS TRAWLING through the internet last night, and discovered that films based on *House Of The Dead* and *Alone In The Dark* are not too far off release. Surprisingly, they look crap. It made me wonder if the film industry will ever learn that because most videogame plots are pretty simple, they don't make good films, especially when the games they keep picking are those with the most flimsy, hackneyed plots around. I mean, the plot for the *HOTD* games was pretty much 'argh, zombies… BLAM!' and the movie seems to be pretty much the same thing, only with bullet time.

And that's because the game isn't an interlude between plot points, it's not a script with a few distractions. If a strong plot does exist, it can only be secondary to the game itself. Yeah, the plot can drive things along, but at the end of the day that's not why we're there. We're playing the game for the interactive experience it gives us, and the plot is generally only a small piece of this. There are exceptions to the rule and there are games with half-decent plots out there. But do you see them released as films. No. Although if you can point me in the direction of a good videogame film, I will concede this point.
Peter Taylor

games™: Why should film makers bother making a decent film out of any videogame licence? They know people will watch it anyway so they needn't put in the time and effort to make the film any good. As the lame *Tomb Raider* movies have shown, all you have to do is snap up the licence of a multi-million selling game and you've got a guaranteed audience – especially if the lead characters are ladies in skimpy outfits. As for gaming stories being insufficient to drive a film, most movie plots can be summarised in a dozen words too, it's just that the plot is central to a film but often extraneous when it comes to games.

AFTER READING DAN Atkins' letter about piracy (**games™**, issue 8), I'd just like to point out a few things. The root of the problem is not the pirates themselves, because they are only guilty of supplying a demand. The problem lies with the games industry itself. If Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft really want to be rid of piracy then the only course of action is to make games more affordable. The average game costs about €50-60, the average pirated game costs €5-25 – it's not hard to see why people will choose a pirate version. Contrary to Mr. Atkins' views, nobody gives a monkeys that "a lot of time and effort goes into developing games" – we want our games, and we want them cheap.

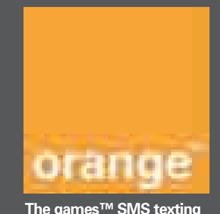
So what's the answer? Under the current system it's impossible to really reduce the prices and still have companies turn a profit. What I suggest is that games publishers learn from the mistakes that the music industry continues to make and embrace the internet

"NOBODY CARES THAT 'A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT GOES INTO DEVELOPING GAMES', WE WANT GAMES AND WE WANT THEM CHEAP"

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***SEGA Rally* and *Mario 64* – yes, they're old, but they're still good. And, er, usually cheaper than new games.**

and new technologies such as broadband and wireless connections. There are several viable ideas for selling games without middlemen…

How about a system whereby when you go to your games shop all you take is your money and a memory stick formatted for your console. You pay for your game and a file is copied to your memory stick. Then you go home and put the memory stick in your machine, and via the internet one reserved copy of the game is sent to your machine (provided that the details match). And what have we lost? The costs for producing the discs plus the overheads of transportation, trade tariffs and VAT that inflate games prices.

The system I describe isn't flawless, but with time and proper research a similar scheme would be a replacement for the current system, and reduce games prices. It's folly to believe that piracy will ever disappear, but if games companies make legitimate games closer in price to the pirated games then the main root of piracy, our own greed, will be greatly reduced. Until then, I'm going back to my pirated version of *Rise Of Nations*…
Jim Foley

games™: Well, your ideas are interesting, and Nintendo has already started a scheme like this in China (see page 15) but we reckon it simply won't work. People are happy to get their Xbox chipped and have a bigger hard drive installed to get games uploaded onto it. However, they expect to get those games cheaply, if not for free. When people pay for something, they don't want codes or passes to upload software. They expect something that can be put on a shelf as part of a collection.

With the advent of the internet, the music industry was similarly concerned that it would lose revenues due to internet piracy and downloads. That hasn't really happened – there are illegal CDs and MP3s floating around, but the music industry is still thriving. While we can't condone piracy, it's clear that the trick, as the music industry has found, is to tolerate it to a degree, safe in the knowledge that people will eventually pay up if the quality and price is right. People have and always will rip things off. At present, as far as videogames go, most aren't good enough and simply don't justify the price tag.

☐ **I'VE BEEN PLAYING** *Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand* for the GBA and have found it an incredibly innovative and refreshing experience. In my opinion, this is exactly what the games industry needs – a developer that isn't afraid of trying something completely different (a game that you can only really play whilst sitting in the sun). For me it adds a whole new dimension to videogames and it's games like *Boktai* that remind me why I love playing videogames so much.

My only concern is that should these games not sell particularly well, developers will be afraid to try anything new and will stick to the genres that they know mainstream gamers will buy. However, I remain optimistic and hope that developers will be given the money and opportunity to create new and unusual games.
Nicholas Cory

games™: We've never actually wanted a game that you specifically have to play in the sun, but we get your point. There will always be



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

TEXT LIFE...

☐ Gr8 mag though on p86 u said u were keen to get your hands on what will prove to be Snake's first appearance on a Nintendo console. Did u forget bout the…
games™: Here we go…

☐ …games on the NES? Oh yeah and on p36 XIII appears twice in the Gamecube release list. Just being picky.
games™: We had a bad month. No, seriously. But we've slapped each other really hard and had a good cry about it.

☐ Will us brits be getting the mana blue GBA SP i have been hearing about?
games™: What's wrong with Arctic Blue?

☐ Just looking at the shots for Max Payne 2, is it me or does Max look like the Coronation St killer Richard Hillman? Do I hear lawsuit?
games™: Yes, yes he does. Except we wouldn't know because we don't watch soaps – we're too hard.

☐ Make it illegal for the winner of the Famicom SP to eBay it… Not that I'm bitter because i cant get all the screen shots, no sirree…
games™: At this rate no-one is going to win the Famicom SP, which leaves us in something of a dilemma. You lot must try harder.

☐ Been playing Advance Wars 2 for too long..Must..Destroy..Neotanks.. But it's a good addiction, right?
games™: Definitely one of our favourite wastes of time.

☐ Brilliant shiny front cover for gtm11 with undoubtedly the king of racers pgr2.
games™: We're like magpies – anything shiny and we're interested…

☐ Game network really blows. Those sad fools who stay up all night texting those 'babes' really do need to get a life.
games™: But what about the people that stay up and watch it?

☐ Do you have a recipe for chicken soup?
games™: Eh? 'Fraid not – the only things we eat are our opponents for breakfast. Or, er, humble pie…

☐ Finally got a copy of radient silvergun for my Saturn. This game should be re-reviewed in your excellent retro section!
games™: Good idea. Send us your copy and we'll get straight onto to it.

"I REMAIN OPTIMISTIC THAT DEVELOPERS WILL BE GIVEN THE MONEY AND OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE NEW AND UNUSUAL GAMES"

innovators who'll try something new, but, in the main, most publishers will stick to the tried and tested – it's what pays the bills, you see…

☐ **WHY HAVE RETRO** games suddenly captured gamers' imaginations? I think there are several reasons. Firstly, nostalgia. A lot of the first generation of serious gamers are getting on a bit – I like the idea of still being able to do the same things at 40 that I was doing when I was 18. A select few are truly excellent games that stand the test of time, but most old games are poor ancestors of their offspring.

Secondly, it's a little different from what's currently on offer. In the games shops, while the kids are part-exchanging two-month-old games for the latest releases, I find myself mooching through the second-hand shelves like a well-fed uncle at a buffet. I've already had my fill, yet the odd tantalising titbit finds itself onto my plate.

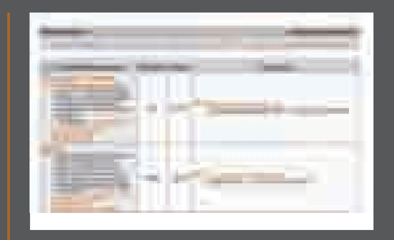
Thirdly, value for money. Now I'm older, I have more money and old games are cheaper. Ten years ago, SNES games were about £40 – new games are still around £40, which is relatively cheaper, but not really cheap enough to be an impulse buy. Yet each week I add to my collection, this week finding myself carrying a PSone *GTA: London SE* to the till despite already owning *GTA2*, *3* and *Vice City*. Why? £2.99. A Saturn and three games (including *SEGA Rally*) for £15? Irresistible!

Finally, old games are perceived as desirable, for which the gaming press can take a good deal of credit. For months after its demise, I evangelised the N64 as an incredible bargain, but no-one listened. So I quietly bought up as many games as I could while they were still there. Now I have the pleasure of seeing people earnestly requesting that if, perchance, a *Mario 64* comes in they get first refusal. Ironically, my copy sits in a drawer at home, like dragon's gold – unused, but jealously guarded. We are becoming a nation of collectors, for whom missing out is unthinkable.

So as the serious gamers are buying old games and the new gamers are only buying a few games before losing interest, we'll continue to see consoles like Dreamcast and GameCube dying off in their prime, and publishers will jump on the retro bandwagon and produce SNES games on a Game Boy Advance and an adapter so you can play these SNES games on a television. Just like the good old days. But publishers relying on retro will quickly find themselves in trouble after this hardware iteration – after all, you can only get people to buy the same thing so many times, despite what George Lucas would have us believe.

So what's next? I think the custom peripheral will become more and more popular. I hope we will see maracas, trackballs, punchbags, kendo-sticks, VR masks and gloves, tickle suits (now there's an idea: online gamers tickling each other) and a host of other devices either return or get invented. While I like the idea of the joystick that plugs into your TV and gives you a load of retro games, I don't like the idea of an arcade-perfect *Defender* running on PS3.
Roland Casewell

games™: Price, lack of imagination on the part of developers, or the fact that we just don't 'get' what's currently on offer – each has a role to play. But while there's nothing wrong with enjoying some of the better slices of retro



FROM THE FORUM

Games are like eggs – do you prefer yours hard or over-easy?

Tragedy
Quote from Itagaki-san of Team Ninja who's working on *Ninja Gaiden* on the Xbox: "I feel that Japanese gamers are a bunch of wimps. American gamers are more hard-core and I want to make it challenging for you guys." I like my games to be hard rather than easy – I love *Project Gotham Racing*, which is a hard game. A game that you can finish in a couple of days is a waste of money in my opinion, so what are your views on this?

SuperAI
A game can't be easy in that you complete it within a day and never touch it again as it has little replay value. However, *Ace Combat 4* isn't the hardest game to complete, but in my opinion it has lots of replay value as it's generally fun to play and with many difficulty settings. If a game is extremely long and reasonably easy to get through it can be excused, although the sense of achievement isn't very high. At the other end of the scale are games that are so hard that you get extremely frustrated. You might get to an early level and get completely stuck as you just can't see how you can do something (*Ecco The Dolphin*, for example). You can get the perfect mix a few ways: *Mario 64* – some Stars are easy but others are extremely difficult. This is constant throughout the game, with things getting harder as you go on. This allows you to progress a long way without getting completely stuck, while taking on challenging Stars in their own time.

bmxgamer
I like my games to be challenging but not impossible. If a game is stupidly hard I get frustrated and end up not playing it (but it is very rewarding when you complete it). Conversely, if a game is easy it seems pointless playing it. However, I don't mind playing easy or hard multiplayer games, though my friends may have different views when it comes to hard multiplayer games.

Master hunter
An exponential learning curve is always the best – as you progress the game gets harder. *Super Mario Sunshine* got this all wrong as some missions were easy, some were hard. But they were completely random in difficulty – you could try for days trying to get past one mission, cursing in frustration, then the next was done so easily you wonder why it appeared afterwards. But some games can be completed easily but bring you back again and again. Such games are usually arcade-based, such as *Crazy Taxi* or, more recently, *Soul Calibur II*. The best games last the longest; this could be from a wealth of options, lots of replay value or simply from its difficulty. So to answer your question – neither. Some easy games have plenty to keep you going even though the harder games' main modes last longer.

$hitigottaheadrush
Expert mode on *F-Zero X* is what I like. Having no bloody idea what you're supposed to do in *Die Hard Vendetta* isn't.

Hong Kong Phooey
I like to be able to choose the difficulty level on a game, ranging from easy to very hard. That way it doesn't alienate anybody. You can play it through on easy with extra health, ammo or so on, or go the hard way with small amounts of ammo etc. Personally, I prefer easy-to-medium games. I can't be bothered with games that are incredibly difficult – I'd end up putting my fist through the telly.

danger_poot
I have no preference with difficulty level. As long as I feel like the game is giving something back to me in return for my precious time, I'm a happy chicken.



So, would you rather blast the Covenant with a mouse or a joypad? Anyone?

gaming on the cheap, don't fall into the trap of thinking that gaming is on the wane or was better then than now. For every classic game there are hundreds of duds – just like new titles.

IS THE MOUSE and keyboard the ultimate control method for the FPS? Reviews of the PC version of *Halo* would make you believe so. It seems that no review is complete without some jaded PC games hack claiming the joypad interface 'spoilt' the original game and restricted their ability to twirl with the speed of a hyperactive ferret. Well, from where I'm sitting only one FPS has offered balanced gameplay where winning is less about how many litres of Sunny Delight you've drunk and more about tactical thinking and positioning. And that game is *Halo*.

Why spoil the game by turning it into an *Unreal*-style test of how quickly you can twitch your wrist? It's not just *Halo* – the joypad has improved the gameplay experience in any number of first- and third-person shooters. Take *Jedi Knight II* on Xbox. The PC gamers would have you believe that having a specific key to scratch Kyle Katarn's backside improves gameplay. But does the game actually play any worse for having to use two analogue sticks and ten buttons? No. And who cares about auto-aim? I don't want to miss a headshot because some fluff is caught in my limited-edition Logitech infrared trackball.

So, PC gamers, stop sitting in the damp back bedroom hunched over your 17-inch monitor. Get downstairs, grab yourself a beer and sit on the sofa. Turn on the telly, invite some friends over and stop moaning for god's sake.
Ben Thomas

games™: This is just a thinly-veiled attack on PC gamers, isn't it? Each control method works brilliantly and suggesting otherwise is daft. Now play nice.

IS IT ME or is the lifespan of consoles getting shorter by the generation? There was once a time when you'd easily get five or more years out of a console before the next generation appeared, but it's only 18 months since the Xbox and GameCube launched and Microsoft and Nintendo already seem to be hard at work on their successors. Based on current predictions the next-gen consoles will be launching in the first half of 2005. That means a lifespan of nearly five years for the PS2, but only a worrying three years for the GameCube and Xbox. Assuming the next-gen consoles all launch at roughly the same time, are we looking at these short life cycles becoming a stamp of the modern gaming industry? Is this because of the rapidly developing technology? Or greed on the part of the manufacturers?

It's also interesting to note that home consoles are now priced similarly to the GBA SP. The competition in the home console market most likely contributes to this, but it makes Nintendo's handheld seem a bit expensive. Will the launch of the N-Gage see a reaction in the pricing of the GBA SP?
Chris Walker

games™: Given the inevitable delays, most new consoles won't be out for a while, so current consoles will last longer. As for the GBA, we've played the N-Gage and Nintendo needn't worry. A price drop, if any, will happen when Sony launches its handheld.

EXTENDED PLAY

